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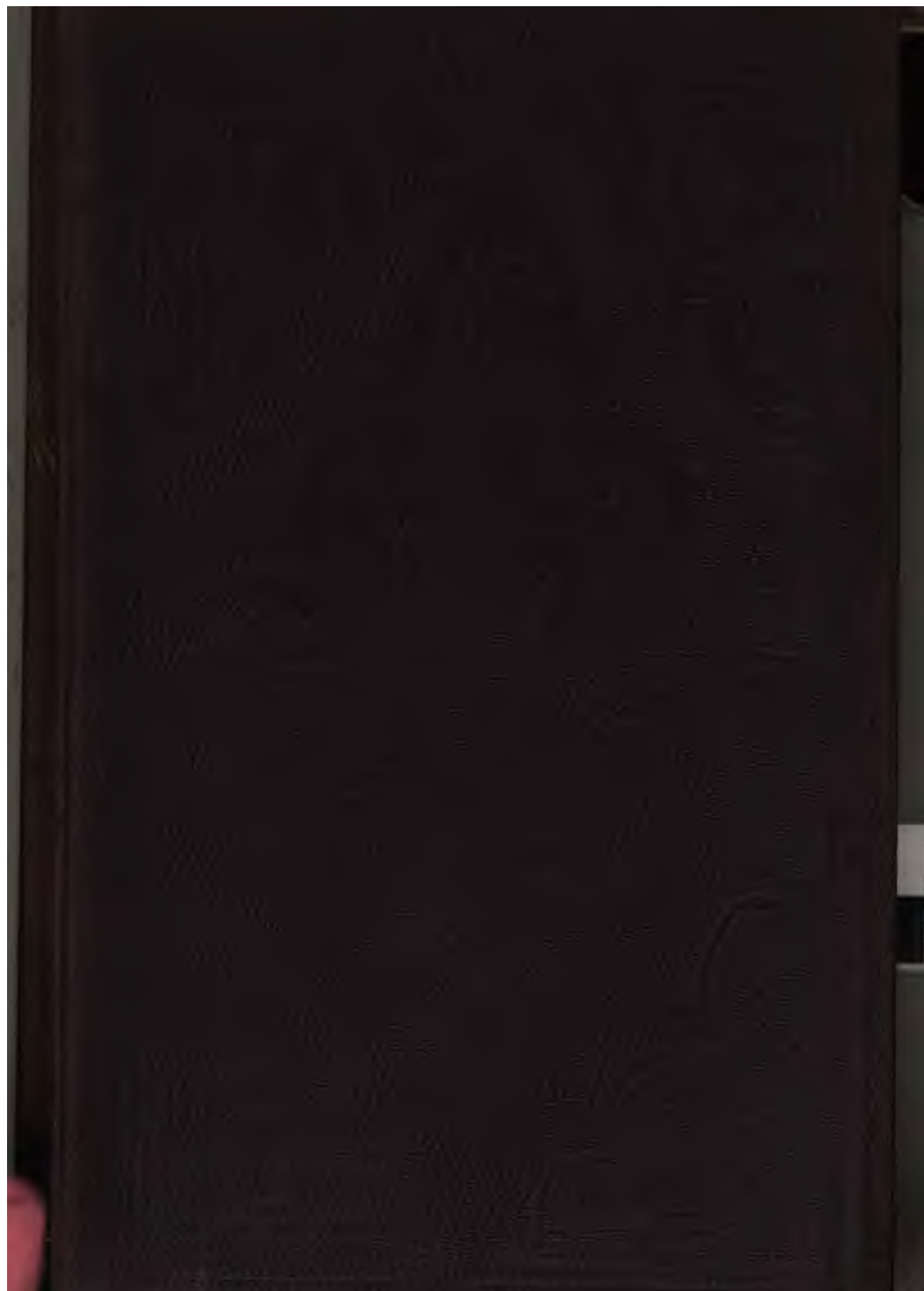
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THEY ARE ONLY COUSINS !

CHAPTER I.

A quick brunette, well-moulded, falcon-eyed,
And on the hither side, or so she looked,
Of twenty summers.

THE PRINCESS.

"FREDDIE, my dear ! we *must* call at the
Warren to-day."

"Five—six—seven—eight— ! Eight more
dark blue, and then for the white !"

"Frederica, my love ! don't you hear me ?"

VOL. I.

B

"Perfectly, mama. Let me see ; you said—ah ! how stupid of me. Two—three—four. Now, that must all come undone again. What could I have been thinking of?"

"What, indeed ? One would suppose your whole happiness, and all your prospects in life depended upon that abominable wool-work, which you are for ever hanging over, ruining your eyes and your figure ! What would Madame Michaud say, I wonder, to see her pet pupil leaning and bending from morning till night."

"Go distracted, most likely, mama, and put an end to her days in the Serpentine. How tiresome this white floss is—ravel, ravel, ravel ! Where could Lewis have bought it ? I told her never to go to Martin's for anything of ——"

"Freddie, my dearest love, will you listen to me ?"

"I cannot help myself, mama ; but what do you want me to listen to ?"

"Why, child, I say that we *must* call at the Warren this morning."

"This morning! Who ever heard of such an unfeeling, barbarous proposition?"

"Don't talk stuff, Frederica; what do you mean?"

"Simply, what I said. Who but yourself would ever dream of going to persecute poor Mrs. Wilmington with a personal call to-day, when we had not finished our last *galop* when the clock struck five this morning? Five—six—seven, and five are twelve. You surely forget, mama, that the Warren is not Oakstone Park, and that Mrs. Wilmington and her daughter will very probably be as busy as any of their handful of servants till bed-time, putting things to rights, and ——"

"My dear, it is by appointment that I am going to the Wilmingtons' this morning."

"By appointment? with whom mama?"

"That dear, charming Lady Vernondale, my love."

"Indeed !"

"Yes ; her ladyship kindly promised last night to show me some very curious stones and things she found the other day. And then, you know, darling, Mr. Vernon leaves the Warren to-morrow, and—and I think it might be as well that he should have an opportunity of seeing *you* again, my sweet Freddie ! You understand, my dear ?"

"Oh ! perfectly, mama. Blue again ; four—six—eight——"

"Frederica Shirley ! At such a time as this to be thinking of your silly blues, and reds, and greens. Child, you must be next door to a perfect idiot. Look at what is staring you in the face."

"Well, mama, I certainly see old vulgar Uncle David's portrait, with its aldermanic wig, from under which the goggle eyes are fixed upon me as stupidly as ever."

"How can you dare to speak so, Frederica Shirley ? How can you venture to look upon

the countenance of that best of men with such mockery on your tongue?"

"It is not a month since I believe I heard you say, mama, that you should now have the portrait of that 'best of men' removed to the housekeeper's room; as, though Uncle David *did* leave you all his money at his death, yet——"

"You had better say no more on the subject, Frederica," interrupted her mother, hastily; "but just be so good as to listen to me. Don't you see that a title—Baroness Vernondale—is literally staring you in the face?"

"Not exactly, I must own, mama."

"Why, child, isn't Mr. Noel Vernon most decidedly struck with you?"

"I wish he were."

"Wish he were! He *is*, if ever man was."

"Then, to please you, mama, let it be granted that he *is*; let us even suppose that matters have gone so far, as that I am the

Honorable Mrs. Noel Vernon ; still, without you assassinate, or otherwise deprive of life, my assumed husband's two elder brothers, how am I to write myself, Frederica Thomasina Roberta, Baroness Vernondale ?”

“ Shert-sighted thing that you are ! Who would ever imagine that you are Thomasina Shirley's daughter ? Why *even* your papa, poor dear Sir Robert, I *do* verily believe would see the thing faster than *you* do ; and that's saying a vast deal ! But *you* take after the Shirleys much more than the Gibbes, that's very certain.”

My Lady Shirley became somewhat out of breath at this juncture ; and it was just as well she did ; for when she chanced upon the subject of the mental superiority and acuteness of the Gibbes over the Shirleys, she was apt to wax excited. Excitement of this description was always sure to betray her ladyship into a certain forcibleness of diction, which but too plainly showed that, *albeit* the wife of a wealthy

knight, and the mistress of Oakstone Park, with all its splendour and luxury, she had not "the blood of all the Howards" flowing in her veins. In fact, if truth may be spoken, the good lady was born Thomasina Gibbs, the sole heir of Peter Gibbs, an immensely rich soap-boiler, and of David Gibbs, brother and partner of the aforesaid Peter. In due time, Thomasina became the wife of Sir Robert Shirley, cotton-spinner and railway speculator extraordinary, and in *her* turn owned a daughter and sole heiress, the fair Frederica.

"Listen to me, Freddie," continued Lady Shirley, after a short pause, "it's true that the Honorable Noel Vernon has two elder brothers, my Lady Vernondale's step-sons ; but what of that ? Isn't the young lord in a galloping consumption, somewheres abroad ?—and isn't Mr. Henry sure to break his neck steeple-chasing, or fox-hunting, before long ? This I had from Mr. Wilmington ; so, you see, my

love, if you will but take the trouble to look after Mr. Noel a little ——”

Frederica nodded her head, and laughed ; but said not a word, nor even raised her eyes from Saint Cecilia and her cherubs-in-waiting, as her busy needle traced their forms upon the canvas.

“I say, if you will only look after him a little——” repeated Lady Shirley, and again came to a stand still.

“What then, Mama?”

“You’re a complete dolt, child, that you are ; and deserve to die without reading your name in the Peerage !”

“And that, I must own, I should be rather sorry for ;” answered Frederica, turning her head on one side to observe the effect of the gold-colored silk stars upon St. Cecilia’s blue robe.

“To be sure you would my sweetest ! That was said like yourself—like your own mother’s

daughter ! But now, tell me, my Freddie ; don't you think Mr. Noel Vernon a very handsome, stylish young man ?”

“Decidedly, mama ; and excessively fascinating.”

“Exactly so, my dear. *Now* we know where we are. And you feel inclined to like Mr. Vernon ?”

“Very much so indeed ;” replied Frederica, softly.

“Well enough, Fred, to—to accept him as a lover ?”

“Why, mama,” answered the young heiress, whose manner was now momentarily becoming more gentle and less assured in tone, “I scarcely know what to say to that. You see, Mr. Vernon has never—”

“I know—I know what you mean, my love ;” interrupted Lady Shirley, “but that’ll all come in due time. Things are at present, what you may call, in their infancy, and so—”


"No denying that, mama."

"But, Freddie as I said before—all in due time—London was not built in a day! Now, look here, my darling! Mr. Noel Vernon, as we all know, wants *money*, and you—"

"Want *name*;" added Frederica.

"Well—um-m-m—not exactly *that*, my dear; for you see the Shirleys are highly respectable, and indeed I *should* say genteel, for Shirley's the family-name of some Earl or Duke, and I've no doubt your Papa's a sort of cousin to him. Then, as for the Gibbises, why I've heard my Aunt Betsy Crookshanks say, that in Queen Anne's time, the Gibbises—"

"I have heard all that before, thank you, mama," interrupted Frederica, who seemed only inclined to listen patiently to her mother's conversation, when Noel Vernon was the hero of it, "pray don't repeat any of that dreadful old woman's sayings just now, or I shall begin to count again."



"I tell you what it is, Frederica Shirley; your Great Aunt Betsy Crookshanks—"

"Three — four — seven — ten—fourteen — eighteen—"

"Your Great Aunt Betsy Crookshanks—"

"Fourteen did I say! yes—fourteen—eighteen—"

"Impertinence!" cried Lady Shirley; "I declare it's too bad! I won't put up with such behaviour, Miss! I wish, with all my heart, that every wool and pattern warehouse in Berlin and everywhere else was burnt to the ground, that I do! If that nasty St Selina, or whatever she is, hasn't given me more annoyance—"

"Not more than Mrs. Betsy Crookshanks' sayings have to me," laughed Frederica, wickedly, "so, pray, mama, go on with what you were observing about Mr. Noel Vernon just now!"

"Well, my dear," continued the Lady of Oakstone, who could seldom withstand the

witchery of her pretty daughter's musical laugh, let it be never so wicked or mischievous, "he, I say, wants money; and you—"

"Name, mama."

"No; not name, child—title. Now, take my word for it, Fred, you've only to give the young man a little proper encouragement, and you'll be engaged to my Lady Vernondale's son before you are two months older!"

"Don't be quite so hasty, mama, in your conclusions. Remember what Mrs. Wiley said at the Grahams' about Noel Vernon and Clare Wilmington!"

"Pooh! stuff and nonsense, child! Mrs. Wiley's a goose to dream of such a thing! Mr. Vernon and Clare Wilmington are *first-cousins*!"

"But I have heard you yourself say, mama, more than once, that there is often greater mischief between cousins, than—"

"I know very well what I have said, my

dear ;” exclaimed Lady Shirley impatiently, “but I again repeat, Mrs. Wiley is an old goose—a tattling, silly old chatterbox ; and I wonder that a girl of any sense could for one moment—But here comes Sir Robert ; so not another word more on *the* subject ! Mr. Vernon and Clare Wilmington indeed ! Pooh ! why *they’re only cousins !*”

CHAPTER II.

Her joyous presence and swete companye,
In fulle contente he there did long enjoye.

SPENCER.

"MARY dear," said Lady Vernondale, entering the drawing-room from the lawn, followed by her two nephews, "I am going to run away with Albert and Talbot this morning if you have no objection."

"Run away with them by all means, Eleanor; but whither are you going?"

"To Morden chalk-pits. Albert tells me we shall find some treasures there."

"What, more fossils, Eleanor?"

"More fossils, Mary. You do not want the boys, do you?"

"Oh no; pray take them, but do not let them lead you too far. We dine at six, remember."

"But, mama," said Gertrude Vernon, "did you not appoint that Lady Shirley to meet you here at three?"

"By-the-by, yes;" replied the Baroness, "but I think I may be excused for breaking the engagement."

"O fie, mama!" exclaimed Gertrude, laughing, "is she not a sad example for me, Aunt Wilmington? Indeed, mama dear, you should wait for Lady Shirley."

"Pooh! nonsense!" cried her cousin Talbot, a handsome boy of thirteen, "don't listen to her, Aunt Vernondale. The Shirleys will keep till another day, but—"

"The fossils will not, I suppose, Talbot," said the Baroness, pinching the boy's ruddy

cheek. "Well, Mary, what shall I do—go, or stay?"

"First let me hear the terms of the engagement," answered Mrs. Wilmington, laughingly, "and then for my sentence."

"Most potent, grave, and reverend '*sister*,'" I certainly did, as Gertie says, make a sort of appointment with your diamond-studded neighbour of Oakstone Park ; but indeed I feel very much disposed to forget all about it. The day is so lovely, and a walk with these dear fellows to Morden pits would be so delightful."

"I cannot think how you, of all people, Nelly," said Mrs. Wilmington, "should have made such friends with—"

"I could not help it," said Lady Vernon-dale, shrugging her shoulders ; "for you must know, Mary, that after supper last night, whilst Noel was waltzing with the fair Frederica, her splendid mama took forcible possession of my ear. She insisted that I was as young as Ger-

trade—declared that Noel was the handsomest creature she had ever seen—hoped that poor Vernondale's trip to Cintra would prove beneficial to him, etc. Then she expatiated for full twenty minutes on the virtues, beauty, and accomplishments of her daughter, and furthermore gave me to understand that she was the richest heiress in the county—trusted that I should speedily revisit the Warren; and then, by some ingenious manœuvre, plunged into into a most confused dissertation on conchology, geology, and mineralogy. There she had struck me where I am most vulnerable, and I involuntarily became more attentive to the wonderful ignorance she displayed of the subject she had now chosen to enlarge upon. Be that as it may, in a few minutes I found, but without knowing how it was brought about, that I was considered as pledged to show this marvellous gentlewoman my collection of fossils to-day at three o'clock."

"Surely then, mama," said Gertrude, laughing, "it would not be quite civil in you to absent yourself?"

"Surely you know nothing about it, Miss Gertie!" exclaimed Talbot Wilmington, caricaturing his cousin's voice and manner.

"Don't be an ape, Talbot!" said Albert, sharply, and colouring deeply. "I wonder that Gertrude allows—"

"Ehem!" laughed Talbot; "the champion again!"

"This Lady Shirley of yours, Mary," rejoined Lady Vernondale, "is a surprising personage in her way. How did she contrive to find out so much about me and mine, and my fossil mania?"

"Perhaps she has an eye upon Noel for Miss Freddie," suggested Albert, archly.

"What! a poor younger son, Bertie? No chance of that, I should say."

"We shall see, aunt," returned Albert; "but

come, dear mother, let us have your judgment on the Baroness Vernondale's case. To go, or not to go, that is the question !”

“Don't say no, mama !” cried Talbot, checking Mrs. Wilmington's words with a kiss. “Auntie, you must, indeed, go with us ! It would be a regular shame to waste your last afternoon upon those Shirleys. You can't refuse your godson now, can you ?”

“I am conquered,” said Lady Vernondale, putting her arm round Talbot's neck ; “to the chalk-pits we will go ; so I shall leave Gertrude and you, Mary, to make the politest possible excuses to Lady Shirley, should she really come.”

“But won't you go with us, Gertie ?” asked Albert, timidly.

“Not to-day,” replied Gertrude, as she leaned back, languidly, in her chair ; “remember how much I danced last night.”

“But if you are tired, you can ride Shintie.”

"No, dear Albert," said Lady Vernondale, "she must not go out to-day. Now, get your hats and baskets, whilst I put on my bonnet, and let us set out."

The disappointed look which Albert cast at Gertrude, as he was leaving the room, was not unperceived by his aunt.

"Your son-and-heir is beginning early, Mary," she laughingly whispered to her sister.

"Nonsense, dear," replied Mrs. Wilmington, in the same low tone ; "you are as romantic as ever, Nelly. Always making up little love affairs. Besides Gertie and Albert are *cousins*."

"Now, my gallant squires!" said the Baroness, as she re-entered the drawing-room, equipped for her expedition, and followed by her nephews, "let us just say 'good bye' to these two sleepy-looking dames, and then for our pilgrimage to Morden-pits. But where are Clare and that eldest hope of mine?"



"In the music-room, I believe, mama," answered Gertrude, "trying over the duetts Lucy Graham lent to Clare."

"Yes, of course!" exclaimed Talbot, "moping together as usual; one would think they were sweet-hearts, instead of *only cousins*!"

There was a general laugh at this sally of the boy's; but there came a thoughtful expression into Lady Vernondale's face, as she drew on her gloves, which, however, immediately vanished, and was succeeded by an amused smile, when she silently observed the sidelong glance which poor Albert again blushing stole at Gertrude.

"All ready now," said the Baroness; "open your basket, Talbot, and let me put in my hammer and stone-breaking gauntlets. Stay! where is my parasol? Oh! you have it, Albert. Now then, *au revoir*, dear Mary! One kiss, my Gertie, and do not move from this nice easy-chair until we return. Tell Clare and Noel we shall expect to be en-

chanted this evening, after their long practice. And be sure, Mary, you make my peace with Oakstone Park. You know where the key of my cabinet is, Gertrude, if it be wanted. Once more, good bye !”

When Lady Vernondale and her nephews were gone, Gertrude again took up the book which she had been reading to Mrs. Wilmington when her mother first came in from the lawn.

“ Shall I go on, Auntie ?”

“ Do, my love, if you are not fatigued. I long to know if all ends happily.”

And Gertrude’s low, soft voice was soon heard again, as she followed the fortunes of Miss Edgeworth’s “ Helen,” whom they had left in the midst of her difficulties. But, interesting as that charming story is, and musical as were the tones of the young reader, Mrs. Wilmington was “ full fathom five” in deep thought before she was aware of it.

“ Certainly they are very much together,



and Noel is a dear, fascinating fellow. He seems devoted to darling Clare; and, indeed, so is she to him. But then, as George said to me the other night, they have always been used to look upon each other as brother and sister, ever since they were mere babies. It would be ridiculous, quite wicked, I may say, to remark anything to them, and by that means, perhaps, put ideas into their heads, which would never have come there of themselves. It would be an actual sin to destroy that frank confidence, and interfere with that affectionate partiality, which should naturally exist between the children of two such devoted sisters, as dearest Nell and I have always been. No, no, dear souls! let them be happy while they may! Poor Noel must sail with his regiment for India in a couple of months, and then Clare, sweet child! will be *obliged* to dispense with his society. Had there been anything in it—anything uncommon in their being so much together—Eleanor would

have certainly made some remark upon it ; *she* would have seen it at once. She has never even *joked* about Noel and Clare, as she did about Albert and Gertie just now. Of course, *that* was all Nelly's fun, for Albert is but seventeen, and Gertie five months younger—perfect children as yet ! It's all very natural, and quite as it ought to be. Noel Vernon is twenty—our darling girl eighteen. Albert seventeen—Gertrude a little his junior. And so the cousins pair off according to their respective ages, like brothers and sisters ! Then there's dear Talbot, and my brother Charles's little Annie ; only half a year between them. What can be more natural ? And were not George Wilmington and I brought up together, as it were, just in the same way ? And—”

But here, kind, gentle, simple-hearted Mrs. Wilmington came to a dead halt in her cogitations, for *that* business had ended in a *marriage* !

This was decidedly what is elegantly termed a *poser* to the lady of the Warren ; but in a few seconds she recovered her serenity, and proceeded with her meditations as satisfactorily (to herself) as before.

“ George Wilmington and I, however, were not related to each other in the most remote degree, which, of course, makes all the difference in the world. As for Noel and Clare ; Albert and Gertrude ; Talbot and little Annie—they are all *cousins*—*first* cousins—which is almost, if not quite, the same, as if they were brothers and sisters ! Psha ! nonsense ! there is no love-making between any of them, that’s very clear ; so, dear, romantic Eleanor may laugh and whisper as much as she pleases about those darling children, Gertie and Albert ; for *they*, at all events, are too young even to dream of such folly, whatever Clare and Noel may be. After all, let them love one another ever so dearly, they are *only* *cousins* ! ”

A tremendous double rat-tat-tat-tat at the hall-door, here put a sudden stop to Mrs. Wilmington's philosophic reflections, and caused her to drop divers stitches in her knitting.

"It must be the Shirleys," exclaimed Gertrude ; "is it not tiresome, auntie, to be interrupted just at such a deeply-interesting part ?"

"Very, my love !" acquiesced Mrs. Wilmington, who, sooth to say, had not heard one single syllable which her niece had uttered during the last quarter of an hour.



CHAPTER III.

What joye haste thou in thy lovyng?
Be it a swete or bitere thyng?

CHANCE.

"*In—deed!!*" exclaimed Lady Shirley, drawing herself up to her fullest height, and bridling like an irritated turkey-cock, as Mrs. Wilmington apologised for her sister's absence. She scarcely knew whether she ought, at once, to bounce out of the room in a fit of insulted dignity, or carry off the affair with apparently unruffled suavity.

The next words which Gertrude Vernon

uttered, decided her on adopting the latter line of conduct.

"Mama desired that we would show you her cabinet, Lady Shirley, if you would like to see it. My brother has the key."

"How exceedingly kind of Lady Vernon-dale; so exceedingly thoughtful and considerate too, to humour my scientific taste! Nothing would give me greater pleasure, my dear Miss Vernon, except to have been fortunate enough to see your charming mama herself!"

Gertrude bowed and smiled, and Mrs. Wilmington rang the bell.

"Let Miss Wilmington and Mr. Vernon know that Lady and Miss Shirley are here, Thompson."

"They have been gone out this half-hour, ma'am," replied the man; "shall I go and—"

"No, never mind, Thompson. Perhaps, Lady Shirley, you would not object to accom-

panying me in search of the truants ; they are, doubtless, in the garden !”

“ I shall be delighted. Frederica, my dear, will you come ?”

“ Thank you, no, mama ; if Mrs. Wilmington will excuse me, I will stay and chat with Miss Vernon, for I am dreadfully tired after so much dancing.”

The two elder ladies then passed through the open window upon the lawn, Lady Shirley bestowing a meaning look upon her daughter, which said—

“ Make the most of your time, and find out all you can about the brother !”

“ What a charming evening we had, Miss Vernon !”

“ Oh, delightful ! I never enjoyed myself so much in all my life before. But then it was the first large dance I was ever at.”

“ Ah ! indeed ! then, of course, *you* would enjoy it. Your cousin is not very fond of dancing, I fancy ?”

" Oh, yes, very ! Why did you think otherwise ?"

" She refused so many capital partners."

" Did she ? I did not observe it."

" Yes—Captain Temple complained that Miss Wilmington had refused to waltz with him three or four times."

" Very likely, Miss Shirley. Uncle Wilmington does not quite approve of the waltz."

" Indeed ! " Why, if I am not very much mistaken, I saw Miss Wilmington waltzing with your brother !"

" Yes—with Noel—several times. My uncle does not mind it amongst *cousins*."

" But, surely it must be very stupid—"

" Clare does not consider it so, I assure you, Miss Shirley. She thinks that no one waltzes so well as Noel."

" That's fortunate for Miss Wilmington ; but your brother—"

" Is equally well satisfied with his partner !"

cried Gertrude, with a merry, innocent laugh.

Frederica tried to laugh too, but made only a lame attempt. A new sensation, a sort of misgiving, suddenly sprang up in her bosom. Was she really more in love with the handsome Noel Vernon, than she had previously imagined herself to be?

"Do you know, Miss Vernon," said Frederica, hastily, and looking somewhat ill at ease, "if you are not positively too much fatigued, I think a turn in the garden would do me good. I feel a head-ache coming on. The day is so close and oppressive."

The day was neither close nor oppressive in Gertrude's opinion, but she immediately acquiesced in Miss Shirley's request, and forth they sallied.

After strolling about the picturesque, old-fashioned pleasaunce—for so it ought, with its mazy walks and quaintly-trimmed hornbeam hedges, to be styled—Gertrude and Frederica

at last fell in with Mrs. Wilmington and Lady Shirley.

The latter immediately perceived that the *tête-à-tête* between the young ladies had not been productive of much satisfaction, at least to *one* of them.

"Is not this a sweet spot, my love?" said Lady Shirley to her daughter in a patronizing tone, "though so entirely unlike our Italian gardens at Oakstone?"

"Very !" replied Frederica, coldly, as she quietly turned her back upon her mother.

Lady Shirley looked as though she would then and there have inflicted a sound box on the ear of the young heiress, but wisely kept the peace, and turned to address Gertrude in honied accents.

"So, my dear Miss Vernon, you have positively broken your mama's commands, and stolen out from the delightful cushions of your easy-chair?"

"I *did* venture to be so disobedient," replied Gertrude, good-naturedly, "at the request of Miss Shirley; and I am sure mama will—"

"Frederica, my love," exclaimed Lady Shirley, "how could you be so thoughtless as to—"

"Any traces of the cousins yet, Mrs. Wilmington?" asked Frederica, coolly interrupting her mother.

"I suspect we shall find them in their favorite retreat, the Hermitage," answered Mrs. Wilmington, "if we walk down this path. Gertie, put this handkerchief over your head, dear."

"And where is Mr. Wilmington to-day?" asked Lady Shirley; "not knocked up with his raking, I hope."

"Oh, no, thank you; but he left this morning as early as half-past eight to ride over to Crossleigh Priory."

"Indeed! Has the marquis then already arrived to take possession?"

"He arrived the day before yesterday, and wrote to Mr. Wilmington, as his late father's oldest friend, begging him to go over to the Priory at his earliest convenience, to assist him with his advice on several matters of importance."

"The old marquis left his affairs in rather an embarrassed state, I have understood?"

"I fear so," replied Mrs. Wilmington, as the little party turned down a shady grass-alley, leading to a part of the grounds known as the Wilderness.

"But Lord Avonmere is a wealthy nobleman?"

"Decidedly," replied Mrs. Wilmington, too single-minded to perceive that she was being *pumped*; "he has lately inherited a very considerable increase of property by the death of his uncle, Sir Alleyn Morley."

"And does his lordship intend to reside at the Priory ?" enquired Lady Shirley, with fast growing interest.

"Principally, I believe."

"What an acquisition he will be to the neighbourhood ; and he is so accomplished, I hear."

"Ah, here are the truants," cried Gertrude Vernon, as the quartette came in sight of a pretty rustic edifice, fitted up like a Hermitage, and open in front.

Within it, side by side, sat a tall, handsome young man, and a very lovely girl, holding a book between them, from which the former was reading aloud, whilst the sweet eyes of the latter followed line by line. Neither looked up, as the ladies stood watching them at a little distance, so intent were they on the page before them.

"How very picturesque," exclaimed Frederica Shirley, crimsoning to the temples, and biting her under-lip nervously.

"Rather dangerous, I should say, my dear Mrs. Wilmington," added her mother, with a spiteful smile, "rather dangerous to the hearts of—"

"Pray, don't be alarmed for them," interrupted Mrs. Wilmington, laughing unconcernedly, "they are cousins."

"*Cousins*, indeed!" muttered Frederica; and then, aloud, she continued, "Really, mama, I think we are most unfeeling to think of breaking upon so interesting a cousinly *tête-à-tête*."

"By no means, Miss Shirley," said Noel Vernon, who had overheard these last words, and now advanced to shake hands with the visitors, followed by Clare Wilmington, whose blushing cheeks were not unremarked by Lady Shirley or her daughter, "by no means. My cousin, I am sure, will be no less delighted, than I am, to congratulate you both on looking so fresh and charming after your fatigues of last night. I had intended myself the pleasure

of riding over to Oakstone this afternoon, to inquire after you, Miss Shirley; but I am fortunate enough to be forestalled."

The sanguine Lady Shirley's face was in an instant lighted up with smiles; and Frederica's heart beat lighter, as she met the bright gaze of Noel Vernon's eyes, and heard the rich, courteous tones of his manly voice addressed so pointedly to herself.

"It is possible, then," she said within herself, "that he *does* only regard Clare Wilmington in a *cousinly* way. Surely his eyes meant *something* when he spoke to me just now."

"Where is the key of mama's little cabinet, Noel?" asked Gertrude, as the party began to bend their steps towards the house again; Frederica and Mr. Vernon bringing up the rear.

"In my waistcoat-pocket, Gertie. Do you want it?"

"Yes; Lady Shirley wishes to see mama's new fossils."

"I shall be happy to play the part of show-man," said Noel, bowing to the fair would-be geologist; then turning to Frederica, he continued—"And do you, also, Miss Shirley, share the fossil-loving taste of our lady-mothers?"

"Indeed, no, Mr. Vernon; I care for nothing half so dull and uninteresting."

"This, perhaps, is more in your way?" rejoined Noel, showing Frederica the book he still held in his hand, and pointing unwittingly to the lines—

"I muse, as in a trance, whene'er
The languors of thy love-deep eyes
Float on to me. I would I were
So tranced, so rapt in ecstasies,
To stand apart, and to adore,
Gazing on thee for evermore."

"Oh, delicious, beautiful Tennyson!" ex-

claimed Frederica, as, having taken the volume in her hand, and glanced at the above, she returned it to Vernon with heightened colour, and a more melting light in her full hazel eyes, "this is, indeed, more in my way than geology."

"And in mine, also, Miss Shirley."

"Did you remember to bring our Tennyson from the Hermitage, Noel?" asked Clare, who was in front with Lady Shirley.

"I have it here, dear Clare."

"*Dear Clare,*" repeated Frederica to herself.

Ah, how that little epithet jarred upon her ears. A moment before, she had been in an Elysium; but that brief, four-lettered word had quite mortalised her again.

But, once more, Noel gave up all his devoted attention to herself, and to so much purpose that, by the time they again found themselves in the drawing-room, Frederica

Shirley was complacently smiling, and mentally saying—

“I am sure there is nothing between them !
They are only cousins after all !”

* * * * *

“Well, Frederica, my dear,” said Lady Shirley, to her daughter, as they drove down the avenue from the Warren, “are you glad, or sorry, that you came with me this morning, in spite of my ‘barbarous and unfeeling proposition,’ as you were pleased to call it?”

“Decidedly not sorry, mama, and yet—”

“Ah ! I suppose you feel a wee bit vexed at my having been subjected to the seemingly cool behaviour of Lady Vernondale, in making an appointment with me, and then taking herself off with those boys ! But then you know, my love, that sort of behaviour is quite the fashion amongst the big-wigs ; and—indeed, I

am rather pleased, than otherwise, at the Baroness's treating me as she has done. It shows that she don't stand on the same ceremony with *me*, as she would with the Grahams, Mrs. Major Wiley, or any of the rest of her sisters *untitled* acquaintances."

Frederica smiled as she listened to her mother's self-appeasing logic.

"And how very kind and friendly of her to leave the key of her cabinet for me !" resumed Lady Shirley, "what a valuable collection she has !"

Frederica nodded an assent, and wondered if any small urchin in the village-school of Oakstone knew so literally nothing of the '*ologies*,' as did her lady-mother.

"Mr. Vernon is certainly a most charming young man, is n't he, Fred ?"

"Very."

"You both seemed to get on famously together, Freddie."

"I begin to understand him better than I did, mama."

"I thought so, my love. What uncommon fine eyes, Freddie!"

"Beautiful! and *so* expressive!"

"Did n't I hear something about copying music, deary?"

"Yes; he has promised to copy a song of Tennyson's which has been set to music, and which he thinks will exactly suit my voice and style. It is a great favorite of Mr. Vernon's, and he intends to call at the Park to hear me sing it, when he returns from Suffolk.

"So they come back to the Warren, when they leave Sir Charles Talbot's, do they?"

"Yes."

"When do they go, Freddie? Is it positively to-morrow?"

"Lady Vernondale and Noel go to-morrow, but they will return in a fortnight, or three

weeks, for Gertrude, who is to remain meanwhile with the Wilmingtons."

"Very good! Then suppose we ask Clare Wilmington and Miss Vernon to spend a few days at the Park, Freddie?"

"Not Clare, mama, on any account!"

"We can't invite Miss Vernon without her, child!"

"No; I fear not. But—really I—I do so so thoroughly dislike Clare and her quiet ways, that—"

"You are thinking of the Hermitage-scene, Fred?"

"I am mama. It comes back to me so vividly. There was a something so—so—I don't know what to say—in their attitude—so *uncousin-like*—so—and yet—the lines he pointed out to me in Tennyson!—his eyes—the song!—no; I believe I am a stupid, fanciful goose; and that all will eventually—but then, mama—he is to sail for India in two months!"

"Don't be so sure of that, dear pet ! If the young man seriously admires you, Freddie—and, on his return from Suffolk, appears to know his own mind with respect to you, my darling, there will be no occasion for his going broiling out to India for his bread, I promise you, Freddie."

Frederica smiled again, and looked so brilliantly handsome, that Lady Shirley said to herself—

"What a beauty she is, the darling ! I declare she ought to be nothing less than a countess, or a marchioness. Now, Noel, Vernon is at present only an Honorable Mr., and may remain so to the end of the chapter ; for, as Freddie says, Lord Vernondale *may* recover his health abroad ; and even if he should n't—why, his brother Henry's horses may *not* break their master's neck after all, in spite of fox-hunting, and steeple-chases, and all Mr. Wilmington said. Now this would be very vexa-

tious—vastly tiresome—quite a heavy trial, indeed. But, should Noel Vernon come forward, as I fully expect he will, I shall certainly make no objection—such a fine, handsome, fashionable fellow as he is, and Freddie is evidently more than half smitten already. As to Clare Wilmington standing in the way, why—who, with a pair of eyes in his head, could think of her white face after he had seen my Fred's beautiful rosy complexion? Besides, Clare Wilmington will have barely enough to find herself in gloves and neck-ribbons; while Freddie—”

Her ladyship's reflections were here broken in upon suddenly.

“Is the Marquis of Avonmere married, mama?”

“I forgot to ask that question, my dear; but I fancy not.”

“How far is Crossleigh Priory from Oakstone Park?”

"About sixteen miles, sweetest. Why do you ask these questions, my Freddie?"

"Oh, I don't know, mama. I merely asked."

And again Miss Shirley relapsed into silence, leaving her mother to resume her train of thought.

"How very odd!" cogitated she, smiling blandly under her veil, "quite wonderful, I declare! Most singular that the dear girl should, at that moment, have been thinking of the Marquis of Avonmere! for I was just going to suppose to myself that, in case Mr. Vernon should not behave as he ought, perhaps this young marquis, if he has n't a wife already, might have no objection to making the richest and handsomest heiress in Kent, mistress of Crossleigh Priory! And then, when at the Priory, the sweet child would be so near Oakstone Park! I wonder if the same idea has crossed *her* mind? But I won't say any

thing about it to her at present. It's never wise to bother a girl with fresh matrimonial views, whilst she is, or fancies herself, in love with any one in particular. Better hold my tongue about it just now."

CHAPTER IV.

Plenty—What with me, sir ?

How big you look !

THE CITY MADAM.

“SIR ROBERT !” exclaimed Lady Shirley, to her well-trained better-half, as she entered the library, followed by Frederica, “you must go over to Crossleigh Priory to-morrow.”

“Very good, my dear, any thing you please,” replied the acquiescent knight, who, always complacent and obedient when ‘my lady’ issued a manifesto, now looked more urbanely smirking than usual, “but, what am I to do there ?”

“Do ! Why pay your respects to the Mar-



quis of Avonmere to be sure. What else should you do at Crossleigh Priory?"

"I was not aware, my dear Thomasina, that his lordship had returned from Italy."

"If he had *not*, Sir Robert, I should n't have desired you to go to the Priory, to-morrow."

"Of course not, my dear."

And then Sir Robert chuckled and smiled, and twirled a card about between his fingers.

"What *are* you making such frightful grimaces for, Sir Robert?" asked Lady Shirley, sharply, for she had no idea of her husband's evidencing a propensity to mirth and pleasantry, without her word of command, "what *are* you giggling at?"

"Who do you think has been here to call, my dear, whilst you and Freddie were out?"

"Why, old Winthorpe—Sir Sampson Pryce—or some such creature, I suppose."

"No, Tommy; neither the one nor t'other."

"Don't call me *Tommy*, Sir Robert! You know how I detest those vulgar abbreviations."

"I am aware of it, my dear."

"Then how do you dare to use them?"

"I ask your pardon, Thomasina."

"Yes, But, Papa," exclaimed Frederica, who was quite tired of the parental dialogue, "who was this mysterious visitor of yours?"

"Pray don't ask him, my love;" said Lady Shirley, *cloudily*, "you may be sure, if it was n't old Pryce or Winthorpe, that it was that old city bear, Jacob Cruttenden, or his odious son John; they are always here. But I intend, in the course of a week or so, to tell them they are in the way, and are, on no account, to come to Oakstone Park, without a pen-and-ink invitation from *me*."

"The Cruttendens have n't been here for three weeks, my dear; neither Jacob, nor John."

"And I will take good care they don't come for three months; so, rest sure of that, Sir Robert."

"Very good, Thomasina. But you haven't yet guessed who the visitor *was*."

"And I don't intend. Freddie, love, go and take off your things, and join me in my dressing-room."

Lady Shirley was about to leave the library, and her daughter was preparing to follow, when Sir Robert whispered to the latter—

"Can't *you* guess, Fred?"

"No, indeed, papa."

"L—or—d—," began the smiling knight, allowing the magical word to steal slowly and impressively from between his lips.

"*Lord!*" cried Lady Shirley, ecstatically, suddenly turning round as this warrant of aristocracy struck upon her delighted ears, "Lord—Lord—what, my dear Robin?"

"Surely not Lord Avonmere, papa?"

"No, Freddie; not Lord Avonmere, but the Earl of Elverland."

"Good gracious !" exclaimed Lady Shirley, "but, did he call on any sort of *business* ?"

"His lordship came, my dear, out of sheer politeness, and the desire to make our acquaintance. He left this visiting-ticket for you and Fred !"

Lady Shirley seized the card, and gazed upon the noble inscription in proud, but silent, triumph. What rampant visions of grandeur and exultation rioted in her soul !

She felt, at that moment, "every inch a Queen."

"But who is this Earl of Elverland, papa ? and what made him call here ? Did he bring any introduction ?"

"Introduction !" repeated Lady Shirley, "nonsense, child ! As if the Earl of Elverland, or any other Earl, required such a thing as an introduction !"

"Why, mama," rejoined Frederica, a wee bit scornfully, "I suppose Oakstone Park is not an hotel, where any gentleman may call when he pleases, let him be noble, gentle, or simple !"

"Of course not, my dear ; but—"

"Now listen to me, both of ye !" cried Sir Robert, for once in a way daring to interrupt the flow of his lady's discourse, "and I will explain all."

"Aye, do, like a good man," added Lady Shirley, with wonderful urbanity and suavity of manner.

"Well," said Sir Robert, "do you remember, Thomasina, my telling you that when my horse, Rufus, ran away with me last Spring, just before we were leaving London, a gentleman came to my assistance, who was so particularly kind and polite, that I gave him my card, and requested that he would come and look me up, if ever he chanced to find himself in this part of the world ?"

"Yes, Sir Robert, to be sure I do; and a great fool I thought you for your pains. For, how could you tell but that this polite stranger might be one of the swell mob? I remember a case which my Aunt Bet—"

"For pity's sake, mama!" implored Frederica, "pray go on with your story, papa! Yes—well—and this benevolent gentleman, who so kindly came to your rescue—"

"Is no other than the Earl of Elverland, Freddie!"

"*Really!*" exclaimed Lady Shirley, who positively felt quite lovingly disposed towards her lord (but not master,) at this juncture, "how romantic, to be sure. And so, Robin—"

"And so, what, my dear?"

"Why, go on—go on, you stupid creature! Tell us all and every thing about this visit. Did his lordship eat his luncheon here?"

"Yes, Thomasina; and he was civil enough to say that he never tasted such cutlets or such Moselle, in his life. Then he walked through

the conservatories with me—looked at Freddie's drawings, and stood gazing at her portrait, over the dining-room mantel-piece, for full ten minutes, without taking his eyes off; and then he sighed, poor young man, till I felt quite unhappy about him."

"But did his lordship know whose portrait it was?"

"Of course he did, my dear, because I told him."

"Quite right—quite right, Sir Robert. You acted with your usual good sense."

Poor Sir Robert did not know what to make of this compliment from his lady, and felt inclined to rub his eyes and pinch himself, to try whether he was not asleep and dreaming.

"And then, my dear," began Lady Shirley, almost beside herself with delight; "and then—"

"His lordship declared the likeness was excellent."

"Indeed !" cried Frederica, in her turn becoming interested. "Where has Lord Elverland seen me then ?"

"At the Opera, Freddie, several times ; but, he added, that had he beheld you only once, he could never forget such a face as yours, you gipsy ! And he concluded by hoping it wouldn't be long before he had the happiness of becoming personally acquainted with you both."

Frederica evidently felt flattered ; and what young girl, under the circumstances, would not ?

"But what made him sigh so, puzzles *me*," resumed Sir Robert, "when he looked at Freddie's picture."

"Does it ?" exclaimed his lady, with a contemptuous laugh ; "so doesn't it me !"

"Perhaps his lordship," suggested the worthy knight, "has had some unfortunate attachment, and our Fred's pretty face reminded him of the lady."

"Nonsense!" cried Lady Shirley, but without deigning to enlighten her spouse; "I know better than that. I see it all plain enough. And what has brought Lord Elverland into this part now?"

"He has come to visit his cousin, Lady Claudia Vandeleur, at Vale Court."

"*Cousin*, again!" murmured Frederica to herself."

"Ah, indeed;" exclaimed her mother, hilariously. "How very delightful! Vale Court, you know, Freddie, is the gayest house in the county, and I have been dying to know Colonel Vandeleur and his lady, ever since they settled there. Now, of course, we shall get in with them. Could anything be more fortunate than Rufus's running away with your papa?"

Frederica, who did not quite see the "of course" of the matter, replied merely by a laugh; and Sir Robert shrugged his shoulders behind the portly back of his commanding officer.

The dressing-bell now rang, and Lady Shirley and her daughter were making their exit from the library.

"To-morrow, then," said the former, as she stood at the door, "to-morrow you will call at Crossleigh Priory, and take Vale Court on your way home."

"Will it not be rather soon, my dear," timidly rejoined Sir Robert, as his late state of excitement began to subside.

"Soon !" echoed Lady Shirley, opening her flashing black eyes, and looking fierce ; "not a bit of it ! Of course, you must call on Lord Elverland to-morrow—not an hour later—and fix a day for him to dine with us. The Marquis of Avonmere too, we must invite to meet him ; but that will do when we know what day will suit the earl."

"Very good, my dear, as you please."

And the door of the library was closed with a loud report.

CHAPTER V.

Tradewell—How she bristles !
Prythee observe her.

THE CITY MADAM.

DINNER was over, and the magnificent lady of Oakstone Park sat alone in her luxurious *boudoir*.

Wonderful to relate, a book lay open on her lap ! It was none other than "Lodge's Peerage !"

Impossible would it be to describe the expression of satisfied pride and *cosey* self-appreciation which shone upon every feature

of her expansive, but still showily-handsome countenance, as she twirled her many glittering rings round and round upon her triumphant fingers, gazing the while, with a radiant smile, upon her gaudy *parterres*, and indulging in sublimest meditations.

With what complacent disdain did Thomasina Shirley now look back upon herself as she *had* been no longer ago than that very morning ! *Then*, the Baroness Vernondale and the Honorable Talbot Vernon were the only people above the rank of the surrounding squirearchy whom she had ever known.

Now, her mind had enlarged—expanded—burst forth as a butterfly from its chrysalis, beneath the glorious warmth of the genial sun !

She *now* beheld persons and things in their own proper light, and valued them accordingly.

The Vernons of Vernondale were no longer her *Dii majores* ! They were merely some of

many. For, was not Lord Elverland, of Elverland Castle and Varley Hall, about to become one of Thomasina's dearest and most intimate friends? Were not Crossleigh Priory and Vale Court beckoning her, (to speak figuratively,) to honor their lordly halls with her presence? Would not the Peerage soon be graced by the name of Frederica Thomasina Roberta Shirley, only daughter of Sir Robert Shirley, of Oakstone Park, Kent?

Where—where were the Gibbses now? where Mrs. Betsy Crookshanks, of Mincing Lane? Gone—gone from the memory of that queenlike woman, as though they ne'er had been! All the earthly associations of her former mortal life have become extinct—annihilated!

The Psyche of Oakstone Park has found a soul!—she is a new being—a bright exhalation from what she *had* been! Oh! that she were blessed by nature with an ear for music and a

voice, then, in the rapture of her heart, would she have warbled, with the pardoned Peri—

“ Joy—joy for ever ! ”

“ Ah, Freddie, my sweetest treasure ! ” she exclaimed, as her daughter entered the *boudoir*, “ come here—come, and see what this charming page says. Read it aloud, my love ; I can’t hear it too often.”

Frederica took the book from her mother in silence, and, in a tone of voice which sounded almost melancholy, after the buoyancy and hilarity of the maternal accents, read as follows :—

“ Hugh Frederic Ingelram De Courcy, Earl of Elverland, Viscount Varley, Baron De Courcy, etc. Born, etc. Married, etc., the Lady Maude Henrietta Sophia Clarendale, only daughter of Richard Plantagenet, fourth Duke of Glencarron, and by her has issue—

" 1. Lady Maude Alicia Plantagenet. Born, etc.

" 2. Lady Emily Juliana.—Countess of Dornton.

" 3. Lady Bertha Clotilda Mary.—Duchess of Olney.

" 4. *Plantagenet Ingelram Harold.—Viscount Varley.

" 5. Lady Elizabeth Eugenia Charl —"

"Stay, stay, my dear," cried Lady Shirley, hastily, "that will do, in all conscience. What do we care for Lady Eugenia, or any other lady? Plantagenet Ingelbram Harold, what a beautiful name it is—he's what we want. You see when that book was published, the earl, his father, was alive; and *our* Lord Elverland was then only a viscount. What a nice age, too! He's just nine-and-twenty, you perceive. And now, my Freddie, turn to 'Avonmere.' A, my sweet love, you are looking amongst the V's. That's it. Don't read it all; only

just peep at the Marquis himself. How old is he, my dear ?”

“Sixty-two, Mama.”

“Stuff, child ! How stupid you are ! What has come to you ? Sixty-two ! why that’s the late marquis. Give me the book. Here we have it. ‘William Augustus, Earl of Egremont, born—’ so and so. You see he was then Lord Egremont, Freddie. ‘Born 14th of November, &c.’ So he’s now—let me consider, I never was quick at calculation—he’s now—”

“Seven-and-twenty, Mama.”

“Thank ye, my love. Yes, seven-and-twenty. His country seats are ‘Avonmere Abbey, Somersetshire,’ and ‘Crossliegh Priory, Kent.’ Town residence, ‘Park Lane.’ What a useful, amusing work this is, Fred !”

“Very, mama.”

“Very, mama ! Why what is the matter with you, child ? What, in the name of goodness, makes you so lack-a-daisical ?”

"Only tired," replied Frederica, with a forced laugh ; "have you forgotten the ball last night ?"

"True, my love ; I *had* forgotten all about it. But coffee will be ready soon, I fancy, and that will refresh my poor pet."

The truth was—but stay.

Let us pass over an hour or two, and follow the young heiress to her own dressing-room, where, having with unusual abruptness dismissed her maid, we shall find her sitting alone *en robe de chambre*. On a table beside her lies a roll of copied music, and in her pretty hand she holds an open note. Both note and music are from Noel Vernon.

Poor Frederica ! she is really very beautiful. Her oval face is paler and more thoughtful than is its wont ; and her large, hazel eyes are filled with an expression of tender softness.

Her mother knows nought of the arrival of the promised song and accompanying billet. Why did not Frederica speak of them to Lady

Shirley? Is it really a sentiment of dawning affection and true-love that thus pales the cheek and gives a new beauty to the eyes of the worldly girl? which thus renders her subdued and pensive?

She looks not like the Frederica Shirley of the morning.

Pity! she had such a mother to warp and pervert a naturally warm, noble, generous heart!

CHAPTER VI.

Don Alonzo — Hold, hold, thou crackbrained fool ! nor
tell me this,

That thou would'st mate with Perez' daughter.

Don Julian — With Inez mate ? Aye, marry would I
then,

E'en tho' her father's bags did hide no gold.

Don Alonzo — Go to ! Hath all remembrance of the
race

From which thou spring'st departed from thy brain,

That thus thou would'st degrade thy noble blood,

And mix it with plebeian puddle ? Fie !

RAY'S "MISER OF MADRID."

"Of fairy-wand had I the power," sings
Maritana the gipsy. Now, though I possess no
"fairy-wand," nor any magic, save that of my

own will, still I can achieve what many a one daily yearns to do—recall past hours.

We have just left the young heiress of Oakstone Park about to retire to rest, at half-past ten o'clock.

Now, it is my will that we should find ourselves in the dining-room at Vale Court, some two hours earlier on the same evening, where sit a lady and gentleman at dessert.

"As we are alone at last," said the Lady Claudia Vandeleur, with a pretty, indolent, languid sort of lisp, as she peeled the skin from a delicious nectarine, "I must beg to know, good cousin Plantagenet De Courcy of Elverland, why I was so gallantly left to myself all day."

"Nay, fair Lady Claudia," returned Lord Elverland, laughingly, "accuse me not of want of gallantry, pray! Remember! when I rode out this morning, I had no idea that Vandeleur would be called to town so suddenly, or, believe

me, my secret mission should have been deferred to another day."

"Well, well, I suppose I must excuse you. But now let my *Fatimite* failing be satisfied as to the cause of this 'secret mission,' as you term it."

"Lady, I obey. But, mark, you must be prepared for rather a long story."

"Begin, then."

"In the first place, Claudia, you know as well as I do, that since the hour when I stepped out of my minority, I have not been exactly miserly, or chary of my income?"

"Ehem! Not *exactly*!"

"In fact, dear coz, perhaps you *might* say that I have been rather profuse, eh?"

"Possibly I might," returned Lady Claudia.

"Nor would you be very far wrong, if you did," continued Lord Elverland. "But, to proceed—as your novelist has it. Do you recollect my once telling you how I enacted the part of guardian-genius to an old fellow,

who was playing Mazeppa, much against his own free will, to a windowful of applauding spectators, in front of White's, a short time since ?”

“ Perfectly. Horace was one of the spectators ?”

“ He was. Then, do you remember how that I rushed—”

“ Yes, yes ; but, pray get on—don't be so twaddling. I recollect the whole affair. How that the elderly Mazeppa hugged and embraced you after the Continental mode ; and how that he thrust a card, inscribed with a Vandalish name, into your aristocratic fingers ; and—”

“ An excellent memory, 'pon my life, Claud,” laughed the earl ; “ so, of course, you have not forgotten that I threw the said card into the fire, in your ladyship's drawing-room in Brook-street, vowing that I would ‘ none on't ?” Very good. And your ladyship may also remember that when we were at the Opera together one evening, we were both struck with a splendid looking girl, with large, gazelle

eyes, seated by a tall, fiercely magnificent dame, whose diamonds made you feel almost inclined to break two of the—”

“I am not likely to have forgotten the heroine of the gazelle-eyes,” interrupted Lady Claudia, with a touch of petulance, assumed or genuine, “for you incessantly raved about her during the next three weeks.”

“And what wonder, sweet cousin Claud? for she is a glorious creature.”

“Go on with your story, Plantagenet.”

“Well, Claudia, I saw those eyes two or three times afterwards, at the Royal Academy, at one of the Ancient Concerts, &c. ; but could not, for the life of me, find out who their owner was. One day, however, just towards the close of the season, as I was riding in the Park, who should I catch a glimpse of but my divinity, looking more *ravissante* than ever, leaning back in a very correct turn-out, side by side with my old friend Mazeppa.”

"The aged equestrian's young wife, I have no doubt," said Lady Claudia, rather impatiently ; for she was not particularly fond of hearing too much of the charms of rival beauties.

"Patience, *madame* !" cried Elverland, "and you will learn all in time. Just as I had made a determination to ride up to the carriage, for the purpose of enquiring after the state of Mazeppa's nerves and general health, that pretty, silly bore, the Princess von Rodenstein, beckoned most vehemently to me. It was useless pretending not to have seen her, so nothing was left me but to obey the summons, unwillingly enough, I own. When I was once again emancipated from the Rodenstein thralldom, off I flew, like the wind, in quest of my *bijou*. To little purpose. Round, and round, and round I galloped—no *bijou*—no gazelle eyes !—no Mazeppa.—All vanished like—"

"Heigho !" yawned the Lady Claudia,

leaning back in her chair, and closing her eyes drowsily.

"Shame, shame, Claudia !" exclaimed Lord Elverland, laughing ; "keep awake but ten—*five* minutes more, and my say will be said."

"Impossible !" murmured the spoiled beauty, sleepily.

"Only five minutes longer, coz."

"I'll try," returned Lady Claudia, with an effort ; "but really, Planty, your voice and style of delivery are so very like poor old Dr. Dodwell's — so excessively narcotic ! Pray oblige me by clearing your voice, and pitching it half a note higher, or two seconds more will find me in the land of dreams."

"Ehem ! ehem ! Will that do, fair Claudia ?"

"Oh, for pity's sake ! go on."

"Let me see—where was I ?"

"Round, and round, and round ; no eyes—no Mazeppa !"

“ *Mille graces*, Lady Claudia Vandeleur ! happy to find you were not asleep. Now, then, was the time to revile and execrate myself for sacrificing the old gentleman’s card to your *Lares* and *Penates* in Brook-street ; for, no more than my horse, could I recal the name that was upon it ; and I knew that neither Vandeleur nor yourself had read it. Sir Somebody Something was all I could remember. I assure you, I was quite *au désespoir*. Some days passed on, however, and I was beginning almost to forget my *inamorata*, when one morning, as I was standing with Lovell Crewe on the steps of his club, a riding habit, a splendid mare, and a dapper little groom, shot past us. ‘ That’s a fine girl ! ’ said Lovell, before I had time to draw breath. ‘ Who is she ? ’ asked I, for you know, Claudia, Lovell Crewe knows every soul in London, good, bad, or indifferent. ‘ She’s a Miss Shirley,’ was the reply ; ‘ the only child of an old *ci-devant* cotton-spinner,

or something of that sort, who is now living in Kent, and has money enough to—”

“ Plantagenet !” exclaimed Lady Claudia, looking as if something dreadful had suddenly occurred.

“ Eh ?—what’s the matter, Claud ?”

“ Shirley ! Sir Robert Shirley ! did you say Shirley ?”

“ Most undoubtedly—Sir Robert Shirley of Oakstone.”

“ And you have called on this person to-day ?”

“ Verily and, indeed, yes, cousin Claudia !”

“ Then *how* could you dream of returning to Vale Court, after having associated with——”

“ Pooh ! nonsense, my dear girl ! Put aside all your exclusiveness for awhile, and listen patiently to a little plain, sensible, matter-of-fact, if you have any of your old affection for Planty left.”

The young Earl looked very handsome, very

sincere, and very lovingly at his cousin, as he said this.

Lady Claudia Vandeleur raised her long, languishing blue eyes to Elverland's face with an expression in them which would have been only too flattering to any man unacquainted with her little ladyship's peculiarities. Now, this same way she had of *looking up at* people was one of her peculiarities.

"I don't quite hate you yet, Planty," she said.

"I am sure you do not, dear coz," returned Lord Elverland, feelingly, "and now, Claudia, just listen to me but for a few minutes more. At present, you see, I am in absolute *want* of that vulgar dross, ycleped money; and get it I must by some means or other. Now, it strikes me very forcibly that I cannot accomplish this most desirable end in a better way than by wooing and winning my beautiful divinity of the opera-box, who, as doubtless you have

already guessed, is none other than the daughter of the Mazeppa of Oakstone Park ! This very morning I called on the old gentleman, who was all smiles, delight, and gratitude, at receiving a visit from his ' noble preserver,' and regretted again and again that my lady and his dear Frederica were not at home to assist him in thanking me for the disinterested service I had rendered him. You may be sure, *belle cousine*, that with an eye to his fair daughter and her golden attractions, I was not very backward in making as agreeable an impression on my soft-hearted, and soft-headed host, as I possibly could. I praised his wine, his house, his gardens—admired his pictures and statuettes—and sighed like a furnace when I beheld the lovely Frederica's portrait. And, without any humbug, she certainly is a superb creature, and lacks but a coronet upon that ivory brow to make her perfect ! Should I gain her ——”

“ And her fortune,” broke in Lady Claudia.

"Exactly, dear coz !" and her fortune, "I shall be a most supremely lucky fellow."

"Excessively !" exclaimed Claudia, with a malicious laugh ; "and it will be so charming for you to hear the future little Earl of Elverland calling this odious old cotton man and his huge, dreadful wife, 'grand-papa,' and 'grand-mama !' Such a degradation, Plantagenet, would be enough to arouse all the De Courcys from their marble tombs, to disown so degenerate a scion of their noble house, as the present and ninth Earl of Elverland, who could so utterly forget his dignity as to think of making a cotton-spinner's daughter the sharer of ——"

"Worthy of an Adelphi melodrama ! "but not a word against the peerless Frederica——"

"May she ever remain *peerless* !" put in Lady Claudia.

"For, by the pride of all the De Courcys," continued the Earl, half-seriously, half-jestingly, "she shall be *my* Countess, or I am not the man I take myself for !"

"Elverland! my dear Planty!" cried Claudia, who perceived immediately that, despite her cousin's mock heroic tone and smile, he was really very much in earnest, "you do not, cannot, mean what you say?"

"On my honor, I do, though, Claudia," returned Lord Elverland, seriously, "as you and all the world will see ere long."

"But, Planty—dear Planty! only consider what a slur you will cast upon us all."

"Would your ladyship consider it a less disgrace, then, to see Plantagenet De Courcy, Earl of Elverland, obliged to fly the country because, forsooth, he had not wherewithal to pay his valet and grooms their salary?"

"My dear Planty, pray do not talk in such a ridiculously frightful way. Nonsense!"

"What I say is the plain, unpleasant fact, Claudia, nevertheless; and I cannot much longer blind the world as to the wretchedly involved state of affairs."

"Yes; but, Plantagenet ——" began Lady

Claudia, who had never seen her volatile, extravagant cousin so serious on such matters before.

"Say no more," interrupted Lord Elverland, making an effort to smooth his ruffled feathers ; "but, like the dear, kind, coaxing little coz, you ever were—despite your die-away airs of ultra-exclusiveness—tell Vandeleur all I have just told *you*, as soon as he returns from town. Then make up your mind to go over with me to Oakstone Park to-morrow, and call on the heiress, with a full determination to do all you can in the way of assuring her that no other man is so fit to become lord and master of herself and her thousands, as Plantagenet, ninth Earl of Elverland."

"I—I call on the creatures at Oakstone Park ? I—*Claudia Vandeleur !* You must be insane, Plantagenet."

"*Calme toi ! calme toi, chère cousine !*"

"Nonsense, ridiculous, preposterous !" exclaimed Lady Claudia, with a pretty show of

indignation, vehemently patting the carpet with her little foot, "I will never even go within a mile of that odious *Oakfield Hall* !"

"Yes—yes, you will, dear Claud—I know you will—when you remember how much poor Planty's welfare depends upon your doing so," said Everland, coaxingly.

"Impossible ! utterly and entirely impossible, Plantagenet ! I—who have always avoided every slightest chance of meeting such *canaille* as these *Sheltons* ! Besides, Horace, I am sure, would never for a moment hear of such a thing as ——"

"Wait until you have asked him, cousin Claudia. If Horace do not allow you to assist me, as far as you can, in this affair, he is no longer the Horace Vandeleur he used to be."

good gracious, child ! what can you have been thinking of ?”

And no wonder my Lady Shirley thus exclaimed, as she examined her daughter's tapestry-work ; for, lo ! there fluttered before her astonished gaze, the fattest and rosiest of St. Cecilia's attendant-cherubs, with a pair of the most undeniably-brilliant apple-green eyes.

“ What *is* the matter, mama ?—what new fault have you discovered in my poor, unoffending Saint ?”

“ Fault, child ! why, look here—what do you call this, I should like to know, but green, apple-green ?”

Frederica *did* look over her mother's shoulder ; and with a slight smile, and the deepest of blushes, seated herself again at the piano, to avoid the searching looks of mama.

Why could not Frederica meet those looks ? And how chanced it that the cherub's eyes *were* green ? What *could* she have been thinking of ?”

"Do you hear, child? what could induce you to make this nasty, indelicate Cupid's eyes green?"

"Green, mama?" repeated Frederica, who found she must say something.

"Green, daughter!" returned Lady Shirley, snappishly, "if you are blind, I'm not. Oh, my poor temples! Will you oblige me, Fred, by leaving off that strumming for a few minutes? you know how distracted my head is this morning. What is it that you are blundering over?"

"A new song, mama."

"And a dismal ditty it is," grumbled Lady Shirley, going to the piano, "where did you get it?"

"Mr. Noel Vernon sent it to me."

"Indeed!—when did it come?"

"Last evening, mama," replied Frederica, reddening again, and looking down.

"And, pray why wasn't I told of it's arrival?"

"I really did not think you would care to hear."

"Was there any message with the song?"

"No."

"Nor a note?"

"Yes; a few lines."

"From young Vernon himself?"

"Yes."

"I suppose, there's no reason why *I* should'nt see the note?"

"Reason!" repeated Frederica, uneasily, "certainly not, mama. I can fetch it, if you wish."

"Hum!" uttered Lady Shirley, pursing up her lips significantly, as Frederica hastily left the room, "I do verily believe this girl of mine is positively in love with that poor young cornet. A parcel of nonsense! But—there, I wont plague myself about it. Lord Elverland will soon drive the pauper—cornet out of her head, or my name's not Thomasina

Shirley ! Silly child, she's a little taken with young Vernon's bright eyes just now !"

Her ladyship fully expected that Noel would make Frederica an offer on his return from Suffolk ; or, perhaps, he might write whilst he was at Sir Charles Talbot's ; and, were it not for the fortunate occurrence of yesterday, and the terms on which the Shirley family were now likely to be with the Earl of Everland, why, the astute Thomasina thought she might have been content to see Freddie the wife of an Honorable Mr. Such a thing now, however, was perfectly out of the question, and my lady was sure that her daughter would soon think so likewise. Lord Everland's intentions were so very evident.

Thomasina then wondered whether the earl was good-looking, and hoped he was ; fearing that, if he were not, Freddie might draw disadvantageous comparisons between his lordship and Noel Vernon.

"To be sure," she soliloquised, "as that hor-

rid, vulgar, old cousin of Sir Robert's, Jacob Cruttenden the soapboiler, says—" 'taint the outside !" but I know well enough, where young folks are concerned, that the 'outside's' more than half the battle ; and I can't but own that young Vernon's the handsomest fellow, by a great deal, that I ever set eyes on."

"This is the note, mama," were the words which put to flight Lady Shirley's interesting reflections.

"Well, child, I see it is ; but you needn't moan out the sentence in that way. Why, to hear you, one would think that this scrap of paper contained the news of our being brought to beggary ; that I and your papa had lost our title ; or something quite as dreadful ! Pray, do exert yourself, Miss ; and don't let me have any more of this sentimental nonsense ! Now, don't seat yourself at the piano-forte again, or you'll tempt me to throw that song into the fire."

"You dare not, mama," cried Frederica,

her proud eyes flashing angrily, as she clasped the music Noel had sent her, in her trembling hand.

"Upon my word, Frederica Shirley, you improve, without a doubt ! *Dare not*, indeed ! I should like to know what I don't dare in my own house ?"

"To do what you said, mama," rejoined Frederica, steadily fixing her dark eyes on her mother's face, with an expression of dignity that astonished Lady Shirley into a less aggressive posture.

"Why, you silly darling, you !" said her ladyship, with a conciliatory smile, "what a foolish child it is, to get so angry and fractious with poor mama, who was only joking all the time. But, come, darling, let me read the note ; and don't look so dull, my Freddie. Ah ! so—very good—a very polite note ! "Kind compliments to Lady Shirley & c." Exceedingly attentive and polite in Mr. Vernon,

my love; but I see plainly enough he *means* nothing after all, so, take my advice, Freddie, and waste not another moment's thought on a poor, flirting, younger son."

Frederica's lips trembled; tears stood in her proud, beautiful eyes; and, impatiently taking the note from her mother's hand, without another observation she quitted the room.

Lady Shirley bore her daughter's contemptuous withdrawal with admirable stoicism; sooth to say, she was used to the sort of thing. Nevertheless, there was a something, *now*, in Frederica's manner and bearing, which was perfectly new. There was less of pettish levity; less demonstrative anger; and more womanly dignity and quiet determination.

Lady Shirley did not know how to deal with her *this* time. In general, there was a sharp cross-fire of words, looks, and gestures, carried on with equal spirits by both parties,

and ending in a fulsome shower of 'dearests'—'darlings'—'pets'—'loves'—kisses, and flatteries, on the maternal side; and a gradual return of sunshine to the spoiled child's brow, which would, however, soon be reclouded at the slightest show of contradiction. In such a case as this, my lady was quite at home; but *now*, her position was a novel one, and sage Thomasina was fairly puzzled. Should she follow Frederica, and open a verbal war? should she try the coaxing system? or, should she let the matter alone altogether?

She eventually decided on the last named course, and started off to hurry Sir Robert's departure, inwardly wishing that Noel Vernon had been at Bath, Botany Bay, or Jericho, before he had ever become acquainted with *Frederica Shirley* !

CHAPTER VIII.

Count, 'tis a marriage of your seeking,
So be it of your wooing.

BYRON.

Petulant she spoke, and at herself she laughed ;
A rosebud set with little wilful thorns,
And sweet as English air could make her, she.

THE PRINCESS.

THE Earl of Elverland stood in the drawing-room at Vale court, already 'armed at all points exactly' the perfection of a well dressed English gentleman.

To him 'enter Colonel Vandeleur,' as it says in play-books.

"Well, Elverland, my boy ! so you are positively meditating an admixture of the rich-blood of the De Courcys with the plebeian fluid of Oakstone park, eh ?"

"Claudia then has repeated the conversation I had with her yesterday, Horace ?"

"Yes ; she drove to the station to meet me just now, and gave me the whole history as we came along."

"And what do you think about it ?"

"I think that you are going to prove yourself a far more sensible fellow, than I ever before considered you."

"Gallant Colonel, I bow to the doubtful compliment !" said Lord Elverland, laughing, "but, seriously, Vandeleur, you approve of my determination ?"

"Most decidedly, Planty. Woo and win the fair Flo——"

"Frederica," corrected the Earl.

"Your pardon, my lord ;—the fair Frederica I should have said. Woo and win her, I re-

peat, and lose no time about it. Such a 'golden bird' as that of Oakstone park, has more than one fowler after her you may be sure, therefore, be 'up and doing!' I met Harry Vernon to-day, as he was coming out of Tattersall's, and walked a little way with him. He asked question upon question, as usual, without waiting for any answer; but, at last, he enquired if I knew anything of a Sir Robert Shirley, whose place, he understood was somewhere in the neighborhood of Vale court? Marvellous to relate, Harry here made a dead halt, and seemed to expect a reply, so——"

"You don't mean to say, Horace," interrupted Elverland, impetuously, "that that horse-jockey animal——"

"Tut, tut, man!" resumed Colonel Vandeleur, "wait a minute, and let me finish my story. I told the horse-jockey animal, as you politely term the Honorable Henry, that I did *not* know the said Sir Robert, except, as having seen him at political dinners and so on;

but that he *was* well known in my neighbourhood, as having the finest fortune, and the handsomest daughter in the county of Kent. 'Then, by Jove!' says Harry, 'Noel's a lucky dog.'"

"Noel! Noel!" repeated the earl, growing every instant more excited; "who the deuce is Noel?"

"Harry's half-brother, Noel Vernon."

"What? that handsome young fellow who was *Conrad* in Lady Fanny Maitland's *tableau*?"

"The very same; and it would appear, from what Harry has learned from a Major Riley, or Wiley, that Lady Fanny's *Conrad* has found a *Medora* (though, by the way, she is much more like a *Gulnare*,) in the beautiful heiress of Oakstone Park."

"The deuce he has," exclaimed Lord Elverland, thrusting his fingers furiously through "his wavy locks with odors teeming," and looking

very much as if he intended to wage war with a lack-a-daisical Dresden shepherdess, who was importunately holding out a basket of exotics, on a fairy table, at the earl's elbow. "But where did the fellow meet Miss Shirley? this Conrad Noel. I mean?"

"This 'Conrad Noel,' or, as I should say, Noel Vernon, met her at the Warren, I believe," replied the Colonel, whose coolness seemed to increase with Elverland's effervescence.

"The Warren, the Warren!" repeated the earl, "who lives at the Warren? where is the Warren? what in the world took *Vernon Noel* to the Warren?"

"Do, my dear Plantagenet, content yourself with one question at a time; you are worse than our friend, the 'jockey animal.' And will your lordship, at the same time, oblige me by bestowing on people their own proper patronymics. The young gentleman we are speaking of, is called Noel

Vernon, *not* 'Vernon Noel.' Excuse me. Now, then, Plantagenet-Ingelram-Harold, for your questions, one by one. But look—what says the time-piece ? Five-and-twenty minutes to six. Old Sir Ranulph is punctuality itself ; and it's a good hour's drive to Rokeby Place. What can Claudia be about ? she knows how particular I am always with the Rokebys."

"Hang the Rokebys !" muttered Lord Elverland, who was now venting his feelings, by rifling the china shepherdess of her flowery treasures, and pelting her with pellets made of the delicate petals.

"How very abominable of you, Plantagenet !" exclaimed Lady Claudia, who entered the room with a decided pout on her pretty lip, "those lovely American flowers, which Idonia Fitz Walter brought me this morning !"

"Pon my word, Claudia, I beg your pardon," said the earl, looking somewhat abashed for his puerile impetuosity, and fancy-

ing that he detected 'a laughing devil' in Vandeleur's mischievously-quiet face, "I really had no idea of what I was doing ; but I can soon make your bouquet look as charming as ever."

However, those three spiteful old spinsters, the Fates, were decidedly against poor Lord Elverland, for, in attempting to adjust the contents of the Dresden maiden's basket, the cuff of his coat caught her coquettish little hat, and down she fell. Thanks to the velvet softness of the carpet, a compound fracture of the left arm was the sum-total of damage done ; nevertheless, the Lady Claudia's pretty pout now gave way to a despairing cry.

"Oh, my *bijou* ! my beautiful, matchless darling ! What have you done, you awkward, tiresome thing ? I would sooner have received that Miss *Selby* as my cousin, than have had my lovely shepherdess broken."

"It can't be helped, now, good people," said Colonel Vandeleur, laughing, "during your

scena, Williams has announced the carriage; so let us be off, or we shall have Sir Ranulph and his old butler in a perfect frenzy."

Lady Claudia did not deign to utter another word, but turning away from Elverland's numberless apologies, she took her husband's arm with the petulant air of a spoiled child. As they were driving to Rokeby Place, Plantagenet, who had rather got the better of his *fussiness*, contrived to obtain plain and satisfactory answers from the colonel, to the questions he had previously propounded in so swift a volley.

"Then you really think I have a fair chance with the heiress, Van?"

"Quite as good a one as Noel Vernon," was the reply.

"That's a Quaker's answer. Say decidedly."

"I leave that for the damsel herself. H o can I, a complete stranger to her, tell how far

affairs have gone between the heiress and the Antinous-like *Conrad*?"

"There can be no question on the subject," interposed Lady Claudia, who, until now, had leaned back in one corner of the carriage, still mourning for the fractured Shepherdess, "of course the *cotton-man's* daughter *would* hesitate between the *cornet* and the *coronet*!"

"So my little wife has at last broken her vow of silence, and to some purpose, too!" said Colonel Vandeleur, playfully taking Claudia's hand in his.

"Don't tease, Horace. You know I am very angry still."

"With me, Claud? I didn't break the Dresden affair."

"Yes, Horace—with you."

"Why, how have *you* managed to fall into disgrace, Vandeleur, as well as my unfortunate self?" asked Elverland.

"*You* are the cause of it, sir," returned Lady Claudia, pettishly biting her red lip.

"I, sweet coo?"

No answer was vouchsafed by the lady ; so the earl, shrugging his shoulders, piteously exclaimed—

"Alas ! that luckless shepherdess ! she's at the bottom of it."

"Not altogether," said Colonel Vandeleur, glancing fondly at his pretty, spoiled wife ; "I think I can tell you how it is, Elverland. Claudia has asked me if she must call on the Shirleys, and I have said—'Yes, if Planty is really in earnest with respect to entering the lists for the fair Frederica.' It would appear that you are so ; therefore, to-morrow, or the day after, we must ride over to Oakstone Park. Come, darling, call up your smiles again ; here we are, at Rokeby Place."

"I wish I were in bed !" poutingly murmured Claudia.

Nevertheless, she was the life and light of Sir Ranulph's formal, stately dinner-table, and received the courtly gallantries of the old

baronet with such bewitching grace, that, despite his usual staid gravity, he might have been heard to say to Lord Stalsfield, when the ladies had left the dining-room—

“I protest, my lord, that were the Lady Claudia Vandeleur unmarried, I verily believe I should forget my age, and throw myself at her feet. She is a perfect angel !”

CHAPTER IX.

Hortensio.—Frets call you these ? quoth she : I'll fume
with them,

TAMING OF THE SHREW.

“SIR ROBERT has returned, my lady,” said the
butler, opening the door with an air of as much
importance as though a crowned-head were
about to be announced.

“Tell James to inform Mr. Lewis then ;
and let dinner be served in twenty minutes,
Lawson.”

“I will, my lady.”

"And—Lawson."

"Yes, my lady."

"Oh—ah—nothing, Lawson."

"Very well, my lady."

How dearly did the magnificent Thomasina love to hear her pink of a butler, or groom-of-the-chambers, as she called him on special occasions, echo and re-echo those words of enchantment—"My lady!" There was a something in Lawson's voice, look, and manner, so superior, so deferential, so *just-as-it-should-be*, that when *he* gave utterance to "My lady!" she felt that she was indeed "My lady!" Lawson was, as she once every week gratuitously informed her neighbours, Mrs. Major Wiley and Mrs. Graham, "such an aristocratic creature"—"such a real treasure." And Lawson himself was like-minded.

The second bell had just sounded, and Lawson was once more making his way to the drawing-room, to announce dinner, when Sir Robert and his daughter severally joined her ladyship.

The instant Frederica caught sight of the paternal countenance, she saw that the good little old gentleman felt himself to be a defaulter in some way or other, for there was a sort of tell-tale flutter, and an execrably-acted show of nonchalance about his manner of offering an arm to either lady, which plainly told that he expected a wiggling from head-quarters before bed-time.

"And did you find both their lordships at home, Sir Robert?" was the first of Lady Shirley's queries, as they took their seats at the dining-table.

"Pray, my dear Thomasina, have patience till I've eaten a bit, for I'm monstrous peckish, I assure you!"

"I suppose you got luncheon, Sir Robert?"

"An excellent one, my dear."

"At Vale Court, or the Priory?"

A crumb was here supposed to have "gone the wrong way," for, with a series of little affected coughings, gaspings, and swallowings,

the worthy knight, after an effort, said, huskily—

“Really, my dear, I can’t eat and converse at the same time. Don’t you perceive I am nearly choking? Sherry here, Lawson.”

“Well, now, then, Sir Robert,” began Lady Shirley, as soon as the turbot and soup were removed, “the edge of your appetite must now, at all events—”

“Fish and soup, Thomasina, my dear, go for nothing, you know,” interrupted Sir Robert, with a jocosity which sat but awkwardly upon him, “eh, Freddie? fish and soup go for nothing. He, he, he!”

“You’re uncommonly droll, Sir Robert,” rejoined Lady Shirley, with a withering smile; for she, as well as Frederica, began to think the small knight had been doing something he should *not*, or had not done something which he *should*.

Every look and gesture betrayed his discomfiture.

Lady Shirley determined that she would not be trifled with, and cleared her voice emphatically.

"Ehem—m—m, Sir Robert !"

"A glass of wine, my dear ?"

"Sir Robert !"

"Champagne to my lady, Lawson ! Freddie, my love, you'll join us ?"

"Did you hear me speak, Sir Robert ?"

My Lady's eyes flashed as bright as her rings.

"I ask your pardon, Thomasina ! oh, yes, I heard you, my dear ; pray, proceed. What did you say ?"

"*Did—you—lunch—at* Crossleigh Priory, or Vale Court ?"

"At—at the Priory, Thomasina ; yes, I lunched at the Priory. A delightful young nobleman, the marquis ? Was so happy to see me—to see one, who had done busi— who had known his respected uncle, the late Sir Alleyne Morley. Lord Avonmere is a widower, you

know, Freddie ; there's a chance for you, missy !"

"A widower !" cried Lady Shirley, "how charming!"

"Yes, my dear ; his wife has been dead nearly two years—she died in Italy."

"Has the marquis any family, papa ?"

"One little boy.

"And is he handsome, papa—the marquis, I mean ?"

"Handsome !" echoed Lady Shirley, "nonsense ; who cares whether a man's handsome or not ! But tell me, Sir Robert, have you settled a day with Lord Elverland for him to dine with us ?"

"Why—hum—ah—not exactly, my dear."

"And why not, pray ?"

"Because—I—hum—I—you see, Thomasina, I—that is—I haven't seen the earl, to-day."

"You were not admitted, then, at Vale Court ?"

"I can't say I was—precisely."

"Was Lord Elverland out?"

"Upon my word, my dear, I—I don't know."

"You asked for him, Sir Robert?"

"Ehem ! not exactly, Thomasina."

"Did you *ever* hear such a creature as that, in all your life, Freddie?" cried Lady Shirley, looking like a cockscomb in full blossom, the while she pointed as coolly at the good Sir Robert, as though he had been a wall, an image, a tree, or any othe inanimate and insensate object, "*do* you mean me to understand, then, sir, that you haven't been to Vale Court at all?"

"I—I believe you are tolerably correct in your supposition, my dear; I hadn't time."

"Time!" reiterated the Lady of Oakstone Park, prolonging the word with Siddonian intonation, while she steadily fixed her gaze upon the delinquent's face.

"Time, Thomasina. I—I really hadn't time. I—I'll make a point of going over to-

morrow, my dear," twittered Sir Robert, keeping his eyes bent down on his plate, fancying all the while that Lawson and the two footmen were making derisive mouths and wry faces at him in their sleeves, "Lord Avonmere, you see, kept me so long talking of poor dear Sir Alleyne, that when my horse was brought round—"

"Lawson!" exclaimed Lady Shirley, in the subdued accents of one who is aggrieved, "let my *vinegarette* be sent for immediately."

One of her Ladyship's 'nervous headaches' coming on. Poor Sir Robert but too well knows of what *that* is the forerunner. He'll wish himself a bachelor before he goes to sleep to-night, or we are vastly mistaken. !

CHAPTER X.

Carlos—Say, maiden, dost thou know his history ?

Elvira—I do ! 'Tis told in few and simple words.

Love joined two youthful hearts, which death
divorced.

Laura is gone ; and Fernand mourns her loss.

RAY'S "*Miser of Madrid*."

"Do you know, Clare," said Gertrude Vernon, to her cousin, as, some five hours after the close of our last chapter, they lay with their pretty heads, Hermia-and-Helena-like, upon the same pillow, "the anecdotes which Uncle

Wilmington has been telling us of Lord Avonmere, have made me feel as if I were in a three-volumed romance. What an interesting person he must be. I wonder if he's dark or fair? Do you know, Clare?"

"Know what, Gertie?"

"Whether the marquis is dark or fair?"

"What marquis, child?"

"Surely you haven't been asleep already, Clare?"

"Asleep! no. Why, Gertrude?"

"Because you appear so unusually stupid, that I don't like to pay you the bad compliment of imagining you to have been awake."

"Awake I have been, though, Gertie; and puzzling myself for the last ten minutes to remember some of those lines on 'Absence,' which Noel repeated to me this morning, before Aunt Vernondale and he left."

"Oh, don't puzzle yourself any more about them just now, dear Clare; but let us enjoy a nice long chat before we depart to Dreamland.

Come, now,—‘attention!’ There’s my word of command. Are your eyes open? Are you quite wide awake?”

“Unquestionably,” replied Clare, laughing, “so now, Gertrude, you shall play inquisitor, and I will give you my undivided attention. What did you last ask me?”

“Is Lord Avonmere dark or fair?”

“A perfect Saxon. I once saw a portrait of him at the Priory, when I accompanied papa thither on business, some two or three years ago. It was painted when the marquis was about seventeen.”

“Was the face handsome, Clare?”

“The expression was intellectual in the extreme.”

“Yes, Clare; but was it handsome?”

“Why, Gertie, in my opinion, every truly intellectual countenance must always be more or less beautiful.”

“Dr. Kendall’s *par excellence*; eh, Clare?”

"Yes ; even Dr. Kendall's."

"Ridiculous. What ! with that Punchinello nose, and protruding under jaw ?"

"But, look at his eyes and forehead, Gertrude ! What can be more splendid ?"

"*Chaque 'un a son goût, ma chère !*" laughed Gertrude Vernon, "but, enough of the Doctor. *Revenons a notre marquis !* Has he blue eyes or—"

"The bluest I ever saw ; with light golden-brown hair, and a complexion which might—"

"Rival your own," interrupted Gertrude, "and make your little brown cousin die of envy. But, tell me, Clare, whom did the marquis marry ? A foreigner was she not ?"

"His cousin, Ginevra Dorani."

"An Italian ?"

"Her father was a Veronese of good family, who came over to England as an artist, and, by some means, got introduced to the late Lord Avonmere, whose sister, the beautiful

Lady Emily Pierrepont sat to Signor Dorani for her portrait, and, to come to the point at once, eventually eloped with him."

"Eloped, Clare? eloped with an Italian artist?"

"Does that stir the proud Vernon blood in your veins, Gertie? Yes; the lovely and patrician Lady Emily Pierrepont—the then Queen of Beauty of the Court—left her brother's house by stealth, and became the wife of the poor Veronese artist, Vincenzo Dorani! a poor artist, it is true, but none the less a gentleman, a scholar, and a—"

"And all for love, Clare?" broke in Gertrude.

"All for love, Gertie. What other inducement could Lady Emily have had for such a step? what, but love the most disinterested and devoted?"

"Heigho!" sighed Gertrude, "I suppose *we* shall be in love some day, Clare!"

"Perhaps so;" replied her cousin; and she, too, sighed.

A pause of two or three minutes ensued, during which, Clare Wilmington involuntarily thought of Noel Vernon; and Gertrude Vernon, by a strange coincidence, of Albert Wilmington. "How *Cousinly*! and how natural!" as good Mrs. Wilmington would say.

"Well, Clare," exclaimed Gertrude, breaking the silence, "pray, go on with your story, What did old Lord Avonmere do—though by-the-bye, he was not old then—on discovering his sister's elopement?"

"He immediately set out in pursuit, hoping to overtake her, ere she and Signor Dorani could reach the Continent; but they had been too expeditious for him. When the Marquis *did* overtake them, Lady Emily was no longer Emily Pierrepont."

"And did Lord Avonmere forgive the runaways?"

“ Not to the day of his death.”

“ How cruel ! And was Lady Emily happy ?”

“ She was, and she was not, Gertie. She was happy in her husband’s tender and devoted affection ; but the difference in their religion, and the fixed hatred of her brother towards Dorani, were a constant source of disquietude and anguish to her. Poor Lady Emily ! she did not live long after her ill-fated marriage, for, at the birth of her second child, she died.”

“ And these children, Clare ?”

“ The elder—a boy, I think—survived his mother but two months ; but Ginevra grew up into a most lovely girl, and was just sixteen, when she first met the present Lord Avonmere, (then Lord Egremont) at Venice, neither of them being aware of the relationship between them.”

“ How was that, Clare ?”

"Ginevra was on a visit to the family of one of her father's noble patrons at Venice—a Conte di San Marcello, I believe, to whom Lord Egvernont had received a letter of introduction, before he set out on his Italian tour, and—"

"But surely, Clare, the names of—"

"Even the names, Gertrude," continued Clare, "did not enlighten the cousins as to their affinity; for, Lady Emily and her husband were never mentioned by the Avonmere family; and Ginevra Dorani, though she doubtless knew that her mother was a Pierrepont, and the sister of the Marquis of Avonnere, had never heard of a Lord Egremont."

"And how did they, at last, find out the relationship?"

"The Conte di San Marcello wrote to Signor Dorani, telling him of the evident attachment which was springing up between Ginevra and a young Englishman of high rank, then stay-

ing in his palazzo. This intelligence immediately took Dorani to Venice ; and then, all was discovered."

" And Lord Egremont ?"

" Declared that, come what might, he would marry his cousin Ginevra. Signor Dorani besought him to leave Venice at once, ere his child's affections were irrecoverably engaged ; or, at all events, to absent himself until the Marquis, his father, was made aware of what was going on. Lord Egremont for some time pleaded with Dorani for his consent to an immediate union with Ginevra ; but Dorani would not hear of it, declaring that his daughter should never marry her consin, without the consent of the Marquis. So, Lord Egremont hastily returned to England ; and his first step, was to break to his mother the startling fact that he loved a foreigner, and that that foreigner was his own cousin, the child of Lady Emily Pierrepont and Dorani the Artist !"

" How astonished the Marchioness must

have been !” exclaimed Gertrude Vernon, “ but pray, go on, dear Clare, for I never was more interested before, not even with my favourite ‘ Helen’ !”

“ I have but little more to tell you, Gertie,” continued Clare, “ for the substance of Lord Egremont’s and his mother’s interviews with the Marquis, has never, as far as I know, transpired. It is certain, however, that two years elapsed, and still Lord Egremont did not return to Italy. But, no sooner did he come into the Marquisate, by the death of his father, than the ‘ Morning Post’ announced the departure of Lord Avonmere for the Continent. A twelvemonth after, he married Ginevra Dorani at Verona, and remained in Italy until the other day, when he returned to Crossleigh Priory, a widower, with an only child.”

“ Poor Lord Avonmere !” murmured Gertrude, with a deep sigh ; “ but tell me, Clare, why did he never bring his wife to England ? Surely his mother would have gladly received

her as a daughter, for mama says she was one of the gentlest, sweetest women she ever met."

"None more so, I believe, Gertie, and she doted on her son; but there is a mystery about the whole matter which I cannot solve."

"And did not the young Marquis and his mother ever meet again before her death?"

"Yes, the Dowager Marchioness went twice to Paris, and Lord Avonmere joined her there for a time."

"Without Ginevra?"

"Yes; she did not accompany her husband."

"How 'passing strange!' is it not, Clare? The Dowager Lady Avonmere died at Paris about a year ago, I remember. Was her son with her at the time?"

"Yes, dear."

"What an eventful history, Clare—more like romance than reality. I hope Lord Avon-

mere will accept Uncle Wilmington's invitation to the Warren for next week !"

"Good-nights" were now exchanged between the fair cousins, and in a quarter of an hour more, Gertrude Vernon was in Venice, floating in a gondola, between an imaginary Lord Avonmere and Albert Wilmington, whilst Doctor Kendall and Lady Shirley took the office of *Gondolieri*.

Clare lay for more than an hour, trying to puzzle out Noel's lines on "*Absence*."

CHAPTER XI.

Father Isidro.—Thus, as 'twas told by sage philosophers
In former times, that this vast globe of ours
Was formed of myriad tiny atoms,
So, our life's made up of little sayings,
And of deeds as small.

MISER OF MADRID.

BEFORE we say "good night" to our *dramatis personæ* on this, the close of their second day's sayings and doings, we may as well listen to what the Lady Claudia Vandeleur and Lord Elverland are talking of, as they are returning

to Vale Court from Rokeby Place. His lordship is in high spirits and good humour ; Lady Claudia, ditto ; and the Colonel going to sleep.

“ I declare I’m half in love with that old sister of Sir Ranulph’s.”

“ Which one ?”

“ Miss Sacharissa, I think they called her.”

“ *Ah, la parfaite horreur !*” cried Lady Claudia, with one of her little shudders ; “ you surely do not mean old Sacharissa ? Now, Etheldreda is a really a delightful specimen of ‘ the Old English Gentlewoman ;’ and even Mistress Cassandra herself, with her excruciatingly stiff back and musk, is bearable. But Sacharissa— I know of no epithet dreadful enough, or disagreeable enough, to apply to that odious spinster.”

“ Perhaps I am mistaken as to the name, coz.”

“ Where did your love sit at dinner ?”

"Between that Sir Samuel Something and myself."

"You are right then, Planty ; it *was* fair Sacharissa. But how, in the name of all that's marvellous, did she cast her glamoury around you, Sir Earl ?"

"Seriously, though, Claudia, I found her most agreeable."

"You are the first person who *has* found her so, then," said Lady Claudia, laughing."

"I assure your ladyship she was becoming quite affectionate to me, when—"

"Plantagenet De Courcy !" exclaimed his cousin, with mock solemnity, "then *thou* art the knight who was destined to soften that Amazonian heart ! Woo her—win her ! Lord of Elverland, if thou be'st a man ! The lovely Sachasissa de Rokeby hath noble *blood*, as well as stores of glittering *gold* !"

"Psha !" muttered the Earl, who did not quite like the emphasis laid on the words '*blood*' and '*gold* !'

"Don't be pettish, Planty," resumed Lady Claudia, "or I shall be tempted to break the truce I entered into with you after dinner. Now, tell me, what did that 'matured enchantress' of Rokeby Place discourse upon?"

"A great many things. Game laws—poaching—mesmerism—the last agricultural meeting—Lord Stalsfield's hounds—the militia—and—the Shirleys!"

"So, so, Plantagenet the sly; I see it all now! And what said Sacharissa to *those*—I mean *the* Shirleys?"

"She told me that she considered Miss Shirley the most splendid horsewoman she had ever seen; and that a son of Lady Vernondale's, a young Cornet, was said to be madly in love with her, but that Lady Shirley would see him hanged, drawn, and quartered, before he should marry her daughter."

"And who was your Sacharissa's informant?"

"A Mrs.—Mrs.—Mrs. Wiley, a great friend of Lady Shirley's."

"I thought so; for Mrs. Wiley and her despicable little Major are the licensed magpies of this part of the county. They pass all their time in going about from house to house, fetching and carrying idle reports."

"You know this Mrs. Wiley, then, Claudia?"

"Heaven forefend! I would not know her for a diamond-mine. But was this *all* Miss Sacharissa said, so completely to have brought you to her feet? No fibs, Planty!"

"*All!*" repeated the Earl; "and is it not enough to prove Miss Sacharissa to be a woman of sense, good taste, and—"

"Excellent!" exclaimed Lady Claudia; "old Sacharissa's *good taste!*"

"She's a gem, at all events, compared with that long, bony, courtesying dame Ethelinda, or Ethelfreda. I should like to

see that starched, elderly female set in the pillory !”

“ Poor Miss Etheldreda !” said Claudia, laughing immoderately, “ what can *she* have done to offend you, Planty ?”

“ What’s the matter, Claud ?” asked the Colonel, aroused from his nap by her merri-ment ; “ has El said anything good ?”

“ The inhuman wretch has just declared that he should like to see our favourite Miss Rokeby set in the pillory.”

“ The monster !” exclaimed Colonel Vandeleur ; “ perhaps you are not aware, Elverland, that Mistress Etheldreda is to be my ‘ second,’ if anything—”

“ Don’t say these things, Horace, even in fun,” interrupted Lady Claudia, leaning her head on her husband’s shoulder ; “ but now, Plantagenet, what has so disgusted you with my old pet, Miss Rokeby ?”

“ She positively had the impertinence to say, when she heard her sister talking to me about

Frederica Shirley and young Vernon, that she hoped Mr. Vernon would never so far forget the respect due from him to the noble line from which he sprung, as to think of uniting himself with a Miss Shirley. The abominable old tabby! By Jove, Claudia! I was within an ace of strangling her with that antideluvian diamond dog-collar she had round her scraggy throat. Say what you please, Lady Claudia, Sacharissa Rokeby is worth a hundred Etheldredas!"

CHAPTER XII.

The safe retreat of health and peace.

“ EDWIN AND EMMA.”

“It’s invariably the case. I’ve noticed it continually for the last forty years—and, perhaps, I may for the next forty—that, directly I determine—as I have done for the week past—and, indeed I told Graham I would—and, in fact, feel it as not only a duty, but a pleasure—so much interest as I take in county matters generally—to ride over to Limehurst, it turns out a wet morning !”

"And whose 'bald discourse' is this?" says the reader.

"Major Dionysius Wiley's," I reply; "the Major *always* talks thus."

"But where is the nominative-case to such or such a verb?" asketh the disciple of Lindley Murray. "What does the Major mean by so-and-so?"

"Apply to the Major himself, dear grammarian," answer I; "you may yet, perchance, meet him face to face—he is no fiction! Do not blame *me*, if you cannot comprehend his meaning, for poor *I* am but the humble medium to 'chronicle' his 'small beer!'"

"The day will clear, depend upon it, Major," returned tall Mrs. Wiley, making "a long arm" to hand her rotund little lord a cup of cocoa.

"It may, Sophia, it may; but just observe how they are rolling along, like huge volumes of smoke from the mouths of fifty cannon. And when they rush in that headlong way—I

have noticed it in the Tropics perpetually. Miss Sacharissa Rokeby and your humble servant were watching them on Friday, from the drawing-room windows at Rokeby-place, when they presented just the same appearance as they do now—the clouds.”

“We shall see, Major; but *I* say that it will clear by twelve; and, therefore, I shall drive up to the Place, and get Miss Cassandra to teach me her new pattern.”

“Upon my reputation as man and soldier, Sophia! you are wonderfully selfish. You had him yesterday, from eleven in the morning until four or five in the afternoon. Now, I *must* go to Limehurst to-day. I assured Graham I would not miss it for the world—besides, if the *county gentry* do not appear, who will support it? Tell me *that*, Sophia, who will support it? Walk, when it is so confoundedly wet, I cannot—go I *must*, therefore, I opine, no one can accuse your humble servant of taking too much care of number-one, if I

insist on appropriating it to my own use to-day. I suppose I shall be home to a six o'clock dinner—but, very likely, *he* may keep me at the Rectory—and I'm sure you can find plenty to do at home for *once* in a way—but, whether *or* not—for I'm not by any means inclined to be unreasonable—and, if it *must* be worked till it falls down dead, why I may as well have something out of it for my money—I paid for it—as any one else—the pony !”

“Have you finished what you had to say, Major Wiley?”

“At whatever length I may choose to discourse, Mrs. Wiley, I consider it your bounden, nay *sacred*, duty—and many and *many* a time have they warned me how it would be—but, to my cost—”

“Please, mum,” said the page, (and a very rustic *Cherubino* he was, despite the plum-coloured stripe down his pepper and salt legs), as he threw open the little breakfast-room door,

"Jones want to know ef you'll want Vellinton afore lunch?"

"Tell the man Jones *I* shall want him—because such things *must* be supported—and more depends on this very one—and I have it from Sir Ramulph Rokeby, Lord Stalsfield, Dr. Kendall, Mr. Graham—all men of mind and influence—and in spite of every pattern that was ever worked or invented — at half-past eleven, precisely."

The page, (whose unadulterated name was Scoones, Roger Scoones, but lengthened into *Scoonesbury* on his first entering the back door of Rose Bower as gentleman-in-waiting to Mrs. D. Wiley and her Major,) never could interpret his master's "dark sayings," and now, as usual, applied to his lady.

"Please, mum, are 'e to 'ave 'im?"

"Sirrah!" vociferated Dionysius, "do you *dare*—I'll use it till I can't move a finger—an impudent young scoundrel! But it is to you,



Mrs. Wiley, your humble servant owes thanks for *this*—and the more you *howl*, sir, the heavier it shall fall—there's nothing like it, whether for blacks or whites—don't tell me about emancipation and missionary humbug—it's the weapon *every* master should wield—in Russia, what would such conduct have met with?—and, again, in England's feudal days—oh! if I but held it in my hand at this moment—get out, you diabolical young *coolie*—a horse-whip!”

“Stay a moment, Major,” interposed Mrs. Wiley, dreading lest Mr. Roger Scoonesbury should retail such diverting little scenes as the above, for the edification of the grooms or stable-boys at Rokeby-place, the Warren, Oakstone Park, or the Rectory; “you have almost carried your joke too far. Poor Scoonesbury positively began to think you were in earnest; didn't you, Schoonesbury? Ha! ha! your master is so funny; isn't he, Scoonesbury?”

"*Funny*, Mrs. Wiley! Upon my reputation as a—"

"Ha, ha, ha! Capital, Major! capital! What spirits you are in this morning! There, run away, Scoonesbury, and tell Jones to have the carriage ready at half-past eleven, whether the day clears or not."

And off ran Scoonesbury, muttering to himself as he went—

"My hey, ef they baint a pair o' rum-uns, I *ham* blest!"

"What the devil, Sophia Wiley! *do* you mean by such—which, had it been a man instead of a *woman*, I'd have *knocked* him to the uttermost parts of the earth—and I'm a fool to suffer it—conduct?"

"You *are* a fool, Dionysius Wiley," said the mistress of Rose-Bower in sternly-placid accents, looking at the stout little military man over the top of the urn; "now don't fly out at me, major! and I'll explain *why* you are a fool."

The major compressed his lips, elongated his mouth, and puffed his cheeks out in a way that would have reminded my Lady Shirley of the vituperated St. Cecilia's nude attendants. Now this compression, elongation, and puffing out, on the part of Dionysius, were meant to express manly indignation, the coolest defiance, and a fig for Sophy's promised explanation. Nevertheless, he felt smaller even than usual, did the Major, and wished, with all his brave heart, that his tall spouse could not see him over the urn, and that she would not be so *very* placid in her tone of address.

The Major knew well enough that it was all over with his drive to Limehurst, if he did not comport himself with the utmost discretion, until breakfast was over. Those eyes and the placid tone told him what he had to expect.

(If "woman's mission" consist in keeping their worser-halves in order, what glorious

creatures would Thomasina Shirley and Sophia Wiley appear in the eyes of Mrs. Ellis !)

But yet—to bow the neck—to succumb—to give way before a female will ! Could he—*he* who had fought, aye, and *bled* upon the battleplain, (a very slight skirmish at Buddlecumnagore, or, some such place, where the major, owing to a singular unsteadiness of the hand, had cut his own ear with his sword,) *ought* he thus to yield ?

One little half-glance more at the green-grey gaze which peered over the ivory tulip, which formed the apex of the urn, decided the question.

Dionysius Wiley—the hero who had *bled* for his country—was conquered by “soft woman’s eye.”

“Well, Sophia,” said he, with a nervous sort of chuckle, “why am I—which, I am sure, in your heart, you cannot think—though, like your humble servant, you sometimes have

your little joke—and, men, wiser than I, have been so termed before—and will be again—a fool ?”

“ Listen, major !” rejoined Mrs. Wiley, who, seeing, as a matter of course, that she should have all her own way, determined, sage strategist that she was, on dropping the offensive, “ I believe I should not have used so strong an expression as ‘ fool.’ Had I called you a silly person, or, an impolitic thing—”

The major bowed his grateful acknowledgments.

“ Or, an impolitic thing,” continued Mrs. Dionysius, “ I should, perhaps, have better conveyed what I intended ; for, silly and impolitic, you must allow it to be, to put yourself in the power of a menial, by flying out, as you continually do, before Scoonesbury. Menials have *tongues*, Major Wiley ; and never do they wag so fast, as when occupied in talking their masters and mistresses over. Depend upon it, major, *your* name is *pretty* well known

"Vell, I'm sure !" cried Scoonesbury, putting his arms a-kimbo, and eyeing cook from the top of her thick, broad-frilled muslin cap, down to her stout leathern boots, and invariable pattens, "you're a noice un, you har ! Vy should n't a man 'ave 'is bit o' jawr, as vell as an 'ooman ?"

"Old yer sarcy tongue, young pewter-pots !" returned cook, aiming a blow with her fair hand at the page's ear.

"Sharn't, hold drippin'-pan !" exclaimed Scoonesbury, making a dive, and avoiding the attack.

"Take that ere then !" vociferated Cook, and away sped the Major's tin shaving-pot, which—

"Miss'd the blue-bottle,
But floor'd the Mogul."

That is to say, the destructive missile struck not the offending page, but it flew through the

window and hit the elbow of the Major himself.

“Now comes the tug of war.”

“Cook !” cries a loud, clear, collected voice, from some part of the interior of the ‘Bower.’

“Ten thousand imps !” ejaculates a harsh, sharp, squib-like voice from the ‘verandah.’

“What *was* the cause of that smash I have just heard ?” asked the ‘loud, clear, collected voice,’ as the door of the kitchen opened, and Mrs. Wiley stood before the belligerent cook.

“Take my word for it—I’m not at all amazed at it—I’ve no hesitation in at once declaring it to be—and I can but wonder, Sophia, how you have so long put up with her—such soup as we have had for the last two months—her curries would turn the stomach of a *dobie*—the cook.”

“Susanna Mogg !” said Mrs. Wiley, with a look worthy of Boadicea Queen of the Iceni,

“explain this matter to me. How came that window-pane to be broken?”

“It were that there young rip’s fault, it were !” replied cook, pointing at Mr. Scoonesbury, and rubbing both her fat, red, glazed elbows alternately with either hand, as though she had chilblains, on them, “’e perwoked me, hand I throwed master’s shaven-pot at i’m, so I did.”

“And you consider yourself a *woman*, do you, Susanna Mogg?” resumed Mrs. Wiley, determined to take the page’s part, if possible ; he being a domestic (once a pot-boy), entirely of her own selection, “vastly feminine conduct certainly !”

“Here it is—it struck me on the funny-bone—though I have no doubt the young rascal richly deserved it—smash-dash it came through the window—if I were now in my *bungalow* at Dumdum, and had a bamboo in my hand—I feel the pain still—the lid is knocked off, and

the spout bent in—turn them both away, Mrs. Wiley! don't listen to excuses—the shaving-pot.”

Then, Dionysius handed in the warlike missile to his lady through the lately-made aperture.

“Elizabeth Cox,” said Mrs. Wiley, turning to the housemaid, who had silently stood by, listening to all that took place, “had you any part in this quarrel?”

“No, mum, I ’adn’t.”

“Then, which do you think was most in fault, Susanna Mogg or Roger Scoonesbury?”

“Please, mum, I’d rayther not say.”

“And I insist upon it that you *do* say.”

“Well, then—both, mum!”

“How did the disgraceful affair arise, Betsey?”

“I’ll tell ’e, mum!” roared Mr. Scoonesbury, keeping a sharp look-out upon Miss Mogg, who seemed to be sidling up towards the poor shaving-pot, which stood on the dresser, looking

very much as though it had had too much to drink, "Cook called master a hole-maid spiled, and a scanderer, and such like; and said as ow you vasn't much better, mum. Haint that hall true Bible 'istory, Betsey?"

Miss Cox poked her first finger into a hole in the dresser-cloth, but did not answer.

"Do you hear, Betsey?" cried Mrs. Wiley; "is what Scoonesbury asserts correct, Elizabeth Cox?"

"I haint a liar!" now burst forth Cook, tying her soiled cap-strings so tight that one would have imagined a sudden typhoon had threatened to deprive her of her head-gear, "hand I never were a liar, ner a gossup, ner a mettlesomematty, for the mather o' that; hand so I'll speak the truth at wonst—slap! hand take my halfreydavey as wot that there young limb said, wor hall the same as wot *I* said. Hand I repeats it again and again, as I throwed the shaven-pot, and smashed that ere winder! I wouldn't stay another quarter in this narsty,

beastly cockletripe's den, which it haint scarcely human, not for all the Lord-Mayors'-shows hin London, I wouldn't ! Them's *my* senterments, Mrs. Wiley."

"Quarter, hussey !" exclaimed the outraged Sophia, "you rest not another *night* beneath my roof, depend upon it ! Out, *out* you turn bag and baggage, you good-for-nothing, abominable slanderer !"

Susanna Mogg laughed derisively.

CHAPTER XIII.

Elsie—I am at home here in my father's house.

Golder Legend.

She was a woman in her freshest age,
Of wondrous beauty, and of bounty rare,
With goodly grace and comely personage,
That was on earth, not easy to compare ;
Full of great love.

SPENSER.

A mother had an only son—
She was a widow.

Proverbial Philosophy.

WE must now, dear reader, quit, for a short

space, the fair county of Kent, and transport ourselves to Seagrove Rookery, Suffolk; where, instead of the rain and gloom which are surrounding that "safe retreat of health and peace," Rose-Bower, we shall bask in bright, gladdening sunbeams, and enjoy fresh sea-breezes, with the Baroness Vernondale, Noel, and little Annie Talbot, who are sauntering along a broad gravel terrace-walk, which commands a splendid view of the ocean dancing and glittering in the morning light.

"You are thoughtful, dear mother?" said Noel Vernon, pressing the hand that rested on his arm closely to him.

"I am, Noel. This dear old terrace, the house, the calm, lovely view before us, all so completely unchanged since my childhood, have called up scenes of past happiness. Here it was, that my brother Charles, Mary, and I, Noel, used to race up and down with our hoops and dogs, as Annie is at this moment doing with her greyhound, a descendent, too, of our

old playmates. Or at other times, we would soberly pace backwards and forwards with dear Uncle Geoffrey, listening by the hour to his 'tales of many lands,' and his 'dangers by flood and field.' It was on this same terrace-walk, too, Noel, that your dear, noble father first told the young, timid Eleanor Talbot, who had for months loved, almost worshipped him, without a hope of return, that all his happiness depended on *her*! Oh, the wild joy of that moment! And now——"

Lady Vernondale's voice faltered, and tears stood in her eyes. Noel again pressed that dear hand in silence; and little Annie, first looking up thoughtfully in her aunt's usually smiling face, said—

"Kiss me, please!"

The Baroness stooped, and kissed the gentle child, who, softly putting her arms round her neck, whispered something in Lady Vernondale's ear, and flitted away, followed by her dog.

“ Charles has but *one* ! ” thought the Baroness, as she gazed after her brother’s only child, “ and I—I am blessed with *two* ! But *this* dear one,” and she fixed her tearful eyes upon the handsome face of her son, ‘ how soon must he leave me—leave me for years, to brave the perils of a soldier’s life—the vicissitudes of an Eastern climate ! Oh ! may an all-merciful God spare him, to bless a widowed mother’s heart ! ”

Eleanor Vernondale was one of those women, whose almost girlish buoyancy of spirit and *gaieté de cœur* might lead some common-place indiscriminating individual to pronounce her void of deep or serious feelings. Such an one would, perhaps, say—

“ Besides, she looks scarcely older than she did twelve years ago, and in that time she has lost the best of husbands and three of her children. Were she a person who *felt* deeply, time and trials *must* have left traces on that fair face.” Out upon such everyday opinions !

There are more Eleanor Vernondale's than one (whom I could name if I would), who, with this youthfulness of appearance, this glad elasticity of spirit, shed light and beauty on their homes—kindling within the hearts of their husbands and children such *love*, such *fearless confidence*, such *perfect trust*, as gladdens the heart of those ministering angels who ever hover over the faithful wife—the tender, Christian mother! And yet, these sweet-spirited women *have* their bitter trials, and keenly do they taste their bitterness. Is it because they go not about from house to house, with dismal faces and pathetic voices, complaining and murmuring at the sorrows which Heaven sees fit to try them with, that they feel not—aye, and most deeply too!—their allotted portion of affliction? Is it because cheerful, though subdued tones—soft, but chastened smiles still linger round the hearth, when sickness and death have done their work, that *she*, from whom this subdued cheerfulness, these chas-

tened smiles emanate, feels not the hand of God ?

Eleanor Vernondale's was, by nature, a sunny, hopeful, gladsome disposition ; yet, none could more acutely feel the pang of sorrow, the sad luxury of melancholy.

A gentle sadness filled her heart this morning, as she paced along the terrace-walk with her only son. Little Annie has not yet returned. They are still alone.

"Noel, my dearest boy," said the mother, "I have, for some time past, wished to question you on a most interesting subject, but have hitherto been withheld from doing so by various causes. I feel, however, that the question *should* be asked, and, perhaps, no time might prove more opportune than the present ; therefore, prepare yourself to find in me a Grand Inquisitor."

"Mother, you startle me ! But pray, say on, and I will give true answers to all your catechising."

"Well, then, dear Noel—to plunge at once into my subject. Do you love Clare Wilmington?"

"Most dearly, mother. How strange a question to begin with!"

"Strange, Noel? why strange?"

"Because, who could, for a moment, doubt my affection for my cousin Clare?"

"Persons might doubt as to the *measure* of that affection—not the affection itself, dear boy."

"How so, mother?"

"First-cousins *have* been known to fall in love with each other; have they not, Noel?"

"Most decidedly."

"And they may legally marry, may they not?"

"Certainly—certainly; but I—I really—"

"Ask your own heart, then, Noel, calmly and philosophically—'Do I love my cousin, Clare Wilmington, otherwise than *as* a cousin?—then, tell me its answer.'"

"Upon my honor, mother dearest! I do *not* think I am in love with Clare; but—"

"You are *not* then, Noel, if you doubt about it. When a man really loves, he *must* know it. In my opinion, there can be no half-way rest-house between love and friendship. The sentiment will steadily remain the latter, or speedily grow into the former. Love is no plant of sluggish growth, that takes, like the aloe, a century to put forth its blossoms."

"But Clare and I have been so long used to love each other, to treat one another as brother and —"

"Is your affection for Clare, then, the same as that which you feel towards Gertrude?"

"You puzzle me, dear mother; I—I believe it is—and yet—"

"You do not practise duetts alone with *Gertie* by the hour together; nor arrange her work-box; nor spend a whole morning in a summer-house, reading sentimental poems to her. All these you do with Clare!"

"Because, mother, Clare is nearer my own age than Gertie."

"Your dear father, Noel, was eighteen years older than myself. The *age* does not make the difference."

Noel Vernon remained silent for a few moments, and then again resumed—

"But why do you question me so closely on this subject?"

"Chiefly, on dear Clare's account, Noel. I dread lest, under the cloak of *cousinly* love, she may be fostering a more tender feeling in her heart, which may be doomed to disappointment."

"*That* should never be, mother. Did I think that Clare had fixed her affections on my unworthy self, I would instantly offer her—"

"You *could*, then, make up your mind to marry Clare Wilmington," interrupted Lady Vernondale, "without doing your feelings *very* great violence?"

"I could," replied Noel, "you smile, dear

mother ! but, methinks the fellow who could *not* make himself happy with such a wife as Clare Wilmington, must be a *very* strange sort of animal."

"Noel, returned the Baroness, "you have never breathed a word to Clare, that could lead her to suppose that you loved her as other than a sister?"

"I believe I may safely answer, 'never!' Of this I am sure, that I never intended to *infer* any thing more. Besides, mother, both Clare and I have so repeatedly heard my Uncle Wilmington declare his excessive repugnance to the idea of *cousins* marrying; and we have talked of it ourselves, too, many times."

"And, on these occasions, was Clare quite free from embarrassment and reserve?"

"Perfectly, mother. Depend upon it, Clare is heart-whole, at least as far as I am concerned."

"I earnestly hope it may be so, dear boy, for several reasons; one, being your uncle's

disapproval of marriages between cousins ; another, that you are leaving—”

“ Leaving, mother ? Why should my leaving England be an objection ? Clare and I are both so young, that—”

“ Your youth, Noel, is the very cause why I should be anxious ; not for *your* sake, but for Clare’s. A *woman*, when once she truly loves, does not easily forget the object of her love. Time — absence — silence — make no change in *her* faithful heart. With *men* the case is different. Now, suppose, my dearest Noel, young as you are, you should sail for India, engaged to your cousin Clare, or, any other girl, and after perhaps a year or two of absence, you should chance to meet with—”

“ I know—I know what you would say, mother ; but rest assured, were I once engaged, nothing could shake my constancy. The beloved of *my* heart would be no ‘ Cynthia of the minute ! ’ ”

“Well, well!” I do most sincerely trust, Noel, that our sweet Clare’s affection for *you* may be as Platonic as yours for her.”

Still, in her heart Lady Vernondale felt a lingering doubt as to whether her son understood his own and his cousin’s sentiments so well as he flattered himself he did.

Sir Charles and Lady Talbot, preceded by Annie and her dog, now made their appearance at the end of the terrace, and whilst the Baroness and Noel go to meet them, we will shift the scene once more to “the Garden of England—” fertile, beautiful Kent.

CHAPTER XIV.

Pedant—God save you, sir !

Tranio —And you, sir ! you are welcome.

Travel you far on ?

TAMING OF THE SHREW.

Dame Ashfield—What will Mrs. Grundy say ?

SPEED THE PLOUGH.

“ PLEASE, mum, Vellinton hand the shay’s hat the door,’ cried Scoonesbury, with a triumphant air.

“ Very well, Scoonesbury ; let your master know. When you address me again, you need not scream ; I am not deaf, Scoonesbury ! ”

By-and-by, down came the Major from his wee dressing-room, ready equipped for the drive; and making his way at once to the front-door, to avoid the pain of leave-taking, he was rather astonished and, of course, pleased, to find "the Fair Sophia" already seated in the carriage, comfortably becloaked and umbrella-ed.

"An unlooked for gratification; eh, Major?" said Mrs. Wiley with a mischievous smile, "but, jump in—jump in! don't keep the pony standing in the damp."

Poor Dionysius, it must be owned, looked excessively blank, but prudently did as he was bid, without even venturing to steal one peep at the green-grey orbs.

Off drove 'the happy pair.'

For five minutes, at the least, the Major was too chapfallen to utter a sound; but, at last, he burst out with—oh, wondrous for *him*! a straightforward query.

"Are *you* going to Limehurst, Sophia?"

"You will be sadly disappointed if I say 'no !' now won't you, Major ?"

"I am sure, Sophia—for it must now be more than thirty years, or—no, not so much—those, even, who owe me a grudge, could not say it, with truth on their side—that—"

"Quite sufficient, Major ;" broke in Mrs. Wiley, "I am sure, by this time, I ought to know how invariably polite you are, without troubling you to explain the same."

"Then, you really *do* intend, Sophia—of course I shall be only too happy—the weather I believe is about to change—but I promised Graham, and—and really—more clouds coming up though—to go to Limehurst ?"

"Nothing of the sort, Major. I merely wish you to drop me at Rokeby Place. It will not take you a quarter of a mile out of your road, and you can call for Mr. Graham after you have safely deposited me."

"But, my dear soul," said Dionysius, becoming tender and considerate directly he

found that he was so soon to be delivered from the gripe of his domestic 'Old Man of the Sea,' and would consequently be left to his own independent devisings for the remainder of the day, "surely it will not be prudent in you—what a climate is this to live in, after the East! life is life in India—such wind and damp as there is—and what can be more trying to the constitution than repeated attacks of catarrh ? to think of walking home from Rokeby Place ?"

"Pray don't bother yourself on *my* account, Major!" cried Mrs. Wiley, who always felt inclined to be fierce when Dionysius attempted *la tendresse* "no doubt the old-maids will send me home in their *charrot* if it goes on raining. But, who have we here ? Sir Robert Shirley, isn't it ? Yes, it is. He's off to the Meeting, I suppose."

"Good-day to ye, ma'am ! I hope I see you well, sir !" said Sir Robert, reining in his

horse, when he perceived that the wheels of the Wiley equipage tarried.

"A sad wet morning, Sir Robert! Pray, how are Lady Shirley and Miss Frederica to-day?" asked Sophia.

"I conjecture that you are bound for—but it is full early yet, Sir Robert—I expect we shall have a first-rate gathering—Lord Stalsfield in the chair—the weather, I trust, may not be against it—Sir Ranulph Rokeby of course, and our good Rector—nothing like example in these matters, Sir Robert—the Meeting at Limehurst?"

"I am now riding over to Vale Court;" replied the Knight, looking as though he would have added, "what do you think of that, old boy?"

"About the subscriptions for the Agricultural Society, no doubt?" suggested Mrs. Wiley, interrogatively.

"Oh, dear, no, ma'am!" answered Sir Ro-

bert, with an air that would given Lady Shirley *some* hopes of her little husband, could, she but have seen him at that moment, "my business at Vale Court, is merely a morning-call. I am on my way to return the visit of my friend, the Earl of Elverland, the Lady Claudia Vandeleur's cousin. I want his lordship to name a day for dining at Oakstone Park. Good-morning, Mrs. Wiley! Good-morning, Major! I shall very probably look in at the Meeting, if I get away from Vale Court in time. Good-day!"

"Vale Court! The Earl of Elverland! Lady Claudia Vandeleur!" gasped the astounded Sophia, as Sir Robert trotted off, "can I credit my own ears? Is it *possible*? The *Shirleys* visit at *Vale Court*? Why, good gracious! Lady Clandia is the very proudest woman in the Three Kingdoms. The Duke of Grandsmore's daughter! *She* visit with Thomasina Shirley—the wife of a—

•

"Cotton-spinner!" put in the major, detonatingly ; for he was no less astonished and bewildered at Sir Robert's communication than his Sophy.

"And the daughter of a ——" began Mrs. Wiley.

"Soap-boiler, by Jupiter !" finished the major."

A thrilling silence of seven-minutes-and-a-half ensued.

"How *did* they manage it?" at length burst from the quivering lips of Mrs. Wiley.

Dionysius coughed sharply, and looked as if he were working out a stiff problem.

"Such an *unheard* of thing !" exclaimed Sophia.

The major shook his head mysteriously.

"*Can* that little man have been hoaxing us?" resumed his lady, after a pause of reflection.

The little man by her side compressed his

lips closely together, and assumed a military air, whilst he brandished his whip menacingly, as much as to say—"Let me catch him at it !"

CHAPTER XV.

Tranio—Sir, this is the house ; please it you, that I call !

TAMING OF THE SHREW.

“UPON my word !” exclaimed Miss Sacharissa Rokeby, as she turned the leaves of a new ‘*Pamphlet on Drainage*,’ and glanced over her shoulder down the avenue of stately elms, “here are those abominable ‘Rose-Bowers’ again. What miserable quarter can the wind be in to-day, that *they* are blown here ? After the last gentle hint I gave Madam Wiley, I—”

"I am truly happy, Sacharissa," interrupted her elder sister, Miss Etheldreda, in a quiet but dignified tone, "to find that your discourteous, not to say rude, behaviour towards Mrs. Wiley, on a former occasion, has not deterred her from favoring us with another visit."

"No fear of that, Audrey, you may rely upon it. Mrs. Major Wiley is such an amiable, forgiving creature !"

"You are so severe, sister Sacharissa," observed Miss Cassandra, in a slender, die-away voice, as she sat bolt upright in a high-backed chair, nursing an asthmatic truffle-dog, and studying Miss Burney's "Cecilia."

"Beg pardon," said Miss Sacharissa, who regarded the *juvenile* Cassandra with unmitigated contempt, "did you speak? or did Dido wheeze?"

"I ventured to observe, sister—" began Cassandra.

"Don't ask that horrid woman to dine,

Audrey, on any account whatever !” exclaimed Sacharissa, addressing Miss Rokeby ; “ but, here she is. Ah, how d’ye do, Mrs. Wiley ? The major, too, I declare ! Excuse my running away—I have just been sent for to the stable to see my mare bled. Perhaps you’d like to go with me, Mrs. Major ? Marshall uses his lancet so cleverly, it’s quite a treat to see him. Out with the instrument—one sharp—”

“ Oh, dear, Miss Sacharissa ! pray don’t !” entreated our sensitive Sophia, while the gentle Cassandra puckered up her forehead and lips, as though herself undergoing some painful operation, and concealed her face with her book

“ *You* Mrs. Wiley—the wife of a hero, who has bled for his country !” cried Miss Sacharissa, with a mocking glance at the round little Dionysius, “ *you* turn pale at the mention of blood ? Truly has the eagle mated with the dove, in your case.”

The major bowed, smiling proudly, and drew himself up with a fearless air, worthy of the king of birds; but his lady, biting her under-lip, and longing to tear the strong-minded spinster's eyes out, turned to exchange greetings with Miss Rokeby and Cassandra.

"May I ask, ladies, if Sir Ranulph has started—for, I should not have intruded this morning, had I not deemed it probable I should meet with him—I am aware how punctual he always is—for Limehurst?"

"Here he is to answer for himself," said Sacharissa, as the door opened for her brother's entrance and her own exit.

Sir Ranulph Rokeby looked the complete "fine old English gentleman," as he bent with Grandisonian grace over the large, bony hand of Mrs. Dionysius Wiley, and then turned to welcome the Major with as much affable courtesy, as though he really took pleasure in his

society, which, however, was certainly not the case.

But Sir Ranulph could not but be kind and conciliating even to those he least liked. Amongst the last category, sooth to say, must be numbered the martial Dionysius and his Sophia—Miss Sacharissa's "Eagle and Dove."

"You attend the meeting at Limehurst this morning, I presume, Major Wiley?"

"Sir Ranulph Rokeby! it shall never be said—and none, so far, *can* say it. I defy them to say it—that I ever neglected in any one single instance—let me live to the age of Meth—Sophia! what was the name of that *very* old individual? And I am one of a long-lived family—thank you, Sophia; yes, *Methusalem*—my grandfather, Sir Peter Dobson, the well-known Oriental traveller (you have read his gifted work on the '*Mortality of the Asiatic Turks*,' I have no doubt, Miss Cassandra—I know you are a patroness of literary genius)—

lived to the advanced age of ninety-nine—my dear, ever-lamented, late parents, both completed their eightieth year, and why should not I ?—my duty to my country.”

Sir Ranulph was amazingly puzzled ; nevertheless, his unchanging suavity, and well-bred quietude of manner stood him in good stead, as usual.

“ May I then infer, Major Wiley,” he smilingly said, “ that you honor the agricultural meeting with your presence to-day ? ”

Dionysius bowed ; and the Baronet seated himself in his invariable arm-chair, next to his twin-sister, MISTRESS Etheldreda, as he always styled her.

“ You must have a bold heart, madam,” he resumed, addressing Mrs. Wiley, “ to venture forth on such a day as this ! I had imagined that Mistress Sacharissa Rokeby was the only gentlewoman in this neighbourhood who had courage to brave such weather. However,

madam, my sisters and I feel the honor of this visit all the more."

Then followed another bow of the Chesterfield school.

"You are exceedingly kind and polite, I am sure, Sir Ranulph," returned Mrs. Wiley, with a delighted and most eloquent smile, fancying—poor, deluded Sophia!—that she was an especial favorite with the courtly Baronet; "but, believe me when I assert, that no weather could be foul enough to prevent my doing myself the pleasure of a visit to Rokeby Place!"

The epithet "*foul*" jarred somewhat unpleasantly upon the ears of Sir Raulph and his two sisters, but they all, of course, acknowledged the Major's lady's compliment with a gracious smile.

"I think, however," pursued Mrs. Wiley, "I should not have left Rose-Bower this morning had not my dear Miss Cassandra

kindly offered to teach me her new pattern; and finding that the Major was obliged to go to Limehurst, I prevailed upon him to drop me here on his way."

"Delighted to see you, I am sure, madam," said Miss Cassandra, by whom our Sophy's gossiping talents were more appreciated than by the other members of the house of Rokeby

"Did you come in your open-carriage, madam?" asked the Baronet.

"We did, Sir Ranulph."

"Then, suppose, Major Wiley, we have it put up until your lady requires it? You will, perhaps, do me the favour of taking a seat in my coach to Limehurst, for I see the rain is falling heavily again?"

"Really, my dear Sir Ranulph, your kindness and consideration are excessive—how can your humble servant sufficiently express his thanks—nothing would have given me greater satisfaction and delight—but I have promised to call for him as I pass——"

"Don't refuse a good offer, major," said Mrs. Wiley with a sunny smile, through the radiance of which, however, the experienced Dionysius could plainly perceive a flash of disguised lightning, warning him to negative Sir Ranulphs suggestion at his peril.

"To call for him as I pass," continued the major, fearing to give in at once, lest the Rokeby's might suppose that he was weakly-indulgent to every request and wish of his Sophia, "a promise is a promise, all the world over—is it not, Miss Rokeby? whether made in old England, the Greek Isles, Norway, or India, and, on my reputation as a man, and a soldier, I don't say it as from myself—my old friend, Colonel Crump—Jerry Crump of the Chookoroo Light Infantry—one of the finest fellows I ever met—constantly used to declare, when speaking of me behind my back—he buried three wives, and was about to take a fourth—'Dinney Wiley's word is more to be trusted than a Bishop's oath,' therefore, I

should be sorry to disappoint him—our worthy pastor, Mr. Graham.”

“That difficulty is speedily surmounted,” said Sir Ranulph rising to ring the bell, “we shall have abundance of room for Mr. Graham.”

The Major did not require any more pressing, so, “Vellinton and the shay,” were disposed of, and Mrs. Wiley placed herself under the tuition of Miss Cassandra, with a hot luncheon in perspective; whilst the elated Dionysius took his seat beside Sir Ranulph, in the Rokeby-family-coach, anticipating, with proud delight, the effect of his appearing at the meeting with so notable a companion would cause in the Limehurst mind.

CHAPTER XVI.

"Now, Dora———
——— yearn'd towards William ; but the youth, because,
He had been always with her in the house,
Thought not of Dora.

TEKNISON.

"MARY," said Mr. Wilmington, to his wife, as he opened the breakfast-room door, "I have just received a note from Lord Avonmere, saying that, if agreeable to you, to receive him, he will dine and sleep here on Monday."

"I shall be delighted to see him George, I

am sure. He will not, I suppose, bring that *poor little thing* with him ?”

“ No ; certainly not. Avonmere never takes him any where.”

“ But, then, to the house of so old a friend of his father’s as you are, George, I thought, perhaps—”

“ No, Mary ; no chance of it. Besides, the Marquis is going into Somersetshire on Tuesday or Wednesday, to look at the Avonmere Abbey property before he returns to Crossleigh Priory, and of course he would not wish to encumber himself unnecessarily.”

“ Oh, George ! but if that child were mine, I could not bear him out of my sight, even for a-day.”

“ You are a woman, dear, and speak as a mother.”

“ And the Marquis is a *father*, George.”

“ Yes, Mary, and no father can be more tenderly devoted to an afflicted child, than is Avonmere ; but he knows full well, that with old

Beppa, the Italian nurse, the boy is in perfect safety, and therefore feels no anxiety at leaving him in her care."

"Poor little motherless creature!" sighed Mrs. Wilmington, as she caught the joyous, ringing laugh of her own darling Talbot, in the garden, and inwardly thanked God for the blessing vouchsafed to her in her handsome, healthful children.

"I will write then to Avonmere," said Mr. Wilmington, "and tell him how happy we shall be to see him."

"Do, George. But will you have time before you start for Limehurst?"

"Plenty, it is only just eleven."

And then, Mr. Wilmington took a chair beside his wife, and occupied himself for a few minutes in tracing out the pattern of the carpet with the toe of his boot.

"Why, what are you thinking of, George? Trying to discover new beauties in our old Brussels?"

"To tell you the truth, Mary, I was thinking of our dear Clare, and as we are now alone, I will take the opportunity of revealing the thoughts that have made me anxious for some time past."

"Anxious !" cried Mrs. Wilmington, nervously, "why should you be anxious about Clare ?"

"You see, dear Mary, she is now of an age when the heart is most open to tender impressions, and I begin to fear—"

"Oh, George ! what *do* you fear ?"

"That we have done unwisely in throwing Clare so much into Noel's society of late."

"You can't mean what you say, dear, George ?"

"I do, most seriously, Mary."

"How very absurd of you then ! begging your pardon. Are not Clare and Noel first-cousins ? And do they not well know your extreme aversion to such near relations becoming still nearer ?"

"They must, I should think, for I have spoken of it, on several occasions, in their presence, although, at that time, without any personal allusion."

"Why, then, this sudden anxiety about them, George?"

"I have been anxious for some weeks, dear."

"But, what has brought your anxiety to a climax?"

"A remark of Graham's."

"Of Mr. Graham's?"

"Yes."

"He is not a man to make idle remarks. What did he say?"

"We were speaking of Noel's approaching departure for India, when Albert and I were at the Rectory last evening; and, upon Lucy Graham's laughingly asking what poor Clare would do during his absence, her father added—'I suppose he will return in a year or or two, and carry off his fair *fiancée*!' 'You

allude, of course,' I said, 'to the beautiful heiress of Oakstone Park? But I really don't think Noel has any more serious intentions in that quarter, than my boy, Albert.' "

"I am not so sure of *that*," murmured Mrs. Wilmington, with an intelligent shake of the head, and a smile, "but, I beg your pardon for interrupting you, George.

"As I said this," continued her husband, "I observed that Graham and his wife exchanged glances, and Lucy playfully accused me of trying to deceive my 'spiritual pastor.' I felt rather mystified, but made some indifferent reply, and so the subject dropped. But when I was leaving, Graham accompanied me to the garden-gate, and, whilst Albert was talking to Lena and Lucy, through the window, he asked me, as an old and intimate friend, deeply interested in me and mine, if Clare is not engaged to Noel Vernon?"

"My *dear* George !"

"You may imagine, Mary, how amazed I

was ; and Graham at once perceived that my astonishment was genuine. 'Is it possible,' he said, 'that you only, Wilmington, are blind to what every one else who runs, may plainly read? Do you not see that your daughter and young Vernon are devoted to each other?' I cannot tell you, Mary, what I felt. Albert, at that moment joining us, put a stop to the conversation, but the subject of it has never been out of my mind since."

"Pooh! pooh! my dear George, how can you let such a thing worry you? True, Noel and Clare are undoubtedly very fond of each other; any one may see that. But as to their being in love—nonsense! People forget that the dear souls are cousins!"

"Then *you*, Mary, don't imagine that there is anything between them?"

"Certainly not."

"I wish I could bring myself to think so."

"Why, look, George, at Albert and Ger-



trude—Talbot and little Annie! How very much attached—”

Stay, stay, Mary! pray stop!” interrupted Mr. Wilmington, laughing in spite of himself, though he yet felt far from easy in his mind; “what a vision of dismay to raise up before me! Albert and Gertrude! Annie and Talbot! Noel and Clare!—*Three* pairs of *cousins*, all in love with one another! The mere supposition is enough to drive one wild. I’ll tell you what it is Mary; when once Gertrude Vernon leaves the Warren, after her present visit to us, she and Albert shall never stay in the same house together for more than a day or two at a time, if I can, by any possibility, prevent it, until one or both of them are married. As for Talbot and Annie—they are mere infants—babies!”

“Babies of thirteen and nine,” thought Mrs. Wilmington.

“But as for Noel and Clare—” went on her

husband. Then he suddenly paused, and bit his lips.

"Really, George," exclaimed Mrs. Wilmington, "if you indulge in that long, dismal aspect, you will positively make me feel quite angry. As for Mr. Graham, I can but wonder at him. The idea of him, of all people in the world, putting such absurd nonsense into your head! Of course the remarks of a giddy girl like Lucy, go for nothing. But—Mr. Graham! The more I think of it, the more I am astonished at him."

"Yet Graham is himself a father, Mary."

"I don't attempt to deny such a well-known fact, George," returned Mrs. Wilmington, who, patient and gentle as she was, was beginning to grow warm.

"A kind, affectionate, watchful father," continued Wilmington, very thoughtfully, "and he has *two* daughters—I only *one*. Surely, then, he must understand girls better than I

do. Lena, too, is engaged, and about to be married—”

“To her *cousin*, Donald Grey,” added his wife.

“I wonder how Graham can endure the thought of it,” cried Mr. Wilmington, beating the carpet impatiently with his foot; “why *first cousins* are almost the same as brothers and sisters !”

“To be sure they are, George,” acquiesced Mrs. Wilmington, hoping to allay the annoyance of her ever-anxious husband’s mind, “and in such a light have Noel and our darling girl ever been taught to regard each other.”

“And yet cousins *do* marry.”

“They *do*, and *may*, dear George; but that is not to say that Clare and Noel will.”

“Will! They never *shall*, while *I* live !”

Saying which, Mr. Wilmington hastily rose and left the room, with a look of so much excitement and irritation, that his gentle wife felt almost alarmed.

CHAPTER XVII.

Macbeth. — Say, from whence
You owe this strange intelligence?

SHAKESPEARE.

Lady Fitz-Urse.—Prate not, good lad, of ancestry
to me!
I tell thee, Gondibert, that Giles Fitz-Urse
Hath noble blood enow in his old veins
To make *thy* boast, rich food for laughing wits.

GONDIBERT.

THE hot luncheon at Rokeby Place was over,
and Mrs. Wiley, with the three spinster-

sisters, was again seated in the Pink Drawing-room.

Even Miss Sacharissa was there; for, when she saw the Rose-Bower equipage and steed disappear through the arch which led into the stable-yard, as she stood at her bed-chamber window, followed by the departure of Sir Ranulph and the detested little Major in the family-coach, she jerked out a very unsentimental resemblance to a sigh—a sound, indeed, not unworthy of Jack Falstaff—and made up her masculine mind to descend to the dining-room at the sound of the luncheon-bell.

Miss Sacharissa proceeded down stairs, amiably determined to spoil the appetite of good Mrs. Wiley, if possible, by a sharp volley of contradictions, irony, flat denials, “*et hoc genus omne.*”

But she did not succeed in accomplishing her very praiseworthy ends.

Mrs. Dionysius Wiley was always sweetness

itself, when seated at a well-spread board,
“nothing to pay.” So, dear Miss Sacharissa’s *petits soins*, so kindly intended, merely met with playful repulses and jocund *badinage* from the Major’s lady, who felt that she could afford to overlook, or smile at, any insults which might be offered her, for the sake of the grouse-pie and *côtelettes à la Maintenon* so invitingly placed before her, to say nothing of divers sorts of pastry and many “cunning confections.”

This, by the way.

We are now in the Pink Drawing-room, where we find Miss Etheldreda employed with her *tatting-shuttle*; Miss Sacharissa sketching a plan of an ornamental Gothic front for the stable of a certain Sir Samuel Culpepper; and Miss Cassandra, with our sweet Sophia, puzzling out a most complicated knitting mystery.

“Well, really,” said the last-mentioned

lady, annotating on something just said by some one, "it is marvellous what wealth will do!"

"Had I not heard it from yourself, madam," said Miss Rokeby, "I could not have credited such a thing."

"Stuff!" growled Sacharissa, mending her pencil-point viciously. "Old Shirley is every bit as good as those stuck-up Vandeleurs."

"If so, then, pray, sister," rejoined Miss Etheldreda, not taking any notice of the other's ungracious manner, "pray, why were you so angry and disgusted when Lady Stalsfield asked us if we intended to call at Oakstone Park?"

"That is quite a horse of another colour," replied Sacharissa; "surely you don't mean to place the Vandeleurs and ourselves on the same footing, Audrey?"

"I think I may as well," answered Etheldreda, with a quiet smile, "for every one else, except, perhaps, in our immediate neighbour-

hood, would place the Vandeleurs considerably above us in the social scale—at least, Lady Claudia, the daughter of the great Duke of Grandsmore !”

“Shame upon you, Audrey Rokeby !” vociferated Miss Sacharissa, looking as black and portentous as a thunder-cloud, “shame upon you, to talk in that strange way ! with the blood of the De Clares—Beauforts—Wallopes—Normanvilles—Rokebys, in your veins ! What was this *great* Duke of Grandsmore’s grandfather, I ask ? A paltry Colonel of a marching regiment—knighted, forsooth, for some non-sical affair in India !”

Mrs. Dionysius could have made a St. Lawrence of Miss Sacharissa Rokeby at that instant ; or, have danced, with infinite glee, around a burning stake in Smithfield, had the said Sacharissa been bound to it !

“And was the father of one of our greatest modern heroes—the first Duke of Grands-

more !” cried Miss Rokeby, following up her sister’s subject.

A generous glow rose to the aged lady’s pale cheek, as she uttered these words, which made her, old-maid though she was, look almost beautiful.

“The Duke of Grandsmore, indeed !” muttered Sacharissa, “a title which didn’t exist fifty years ago.”

“True,” returned Etheldreda, “the title was bestowed on the Lady Claudia Vandeleur’s grand-father, as a mark of his Sovereign’s earnest sense of gratitude for tried loyalty and unflinching courage in defence of King and country. How proud and honorable a boast for all the Granbys of Grandsmore !”

“Look there, Etheldreda Rokeby,” cried Miss Sacharissa, starting up from her seat, and pointing round to a host of portraits, painted in the costumes of all reigns, from the ‘dark ages’ up to these terribly enlightened days, “when the Granbys can show such an array as that, then

let them boast of their nobility! See! Sir Reginald de Normanville, who fell at Agincourt! Agatha de Wallope, who was wooed for his wife by a Bohemian Monarch! Ranulph de Rokeby and Hilary de Clare, the first scholars of their day! the Lady Jane Beaufort! Thomas Oxenden, a Mitred Abbot! When the Lady Claudia Vandeleur can point out such ancestors as *these* ——”

“Stay, sister,” interrupted Miss Rokeby, with undisturbed composure of countenance and manner, “you appear entirely to have forgotten that Lady Claudia, on the maternal side, can number the De Coureys of Elverland—the Grevilles—Mountjoys—and *Plantagenets*, amongst her immediate ancestry!”

“Pooh!” cried Sacharissa, with anything but an aristocratic thump of her clenched fist on the table, which made poor, timid, perpendicular Miss Cassandra jump in her chair and drop several stitches, “it is ridiculous to talk to me in this way, Audrey. Plantagenet, or

no Plantagenet, these Vandeleurs are nobodies *here*, in spite of all their trumpery *exclusivism*, and insolent assumption! The Vandeleurs, in my opinion, are of no greater account in this, *our* County of Kent, than the Shirleys, or the — They are both new-comers—upstarts—interlopers.”

“This is *too* absurd,” exclaimed Miss Etheldreda.

“Have not *we* Rokebys,” continued Sacharissa, emphasizing every third word with her knuckles on the table, “lived on this very spot, if not on this very manor, ever since the Conquest? Are not the Rokebys the very fathers—nay, the *Kings* of the County? What great deed is there recorded of Kent, or Kentish men, in the history of this Island, but the honored name of Rokeby appears foremost on the page? And then, to talk of these Vandeleurs! The very name has something finical and un-English in its sound.”

And having prated on until her auditors were thoroughly tired of the subject, especially

Mrs. Major Wiley (who was about as innocent of patrician forefathers as any democratic heart "down right-away East" could desire), Miss Sacahrissa Rokeby sulkily reseated herself, and seized her pencil. A dead pause of some minutes ensued, during which we will say a few words, on our own responsibility, respecting

"THE SISTERS THREE."

In the first place, each of them was more or less imbued with Family Pride.

With Sacharissa it was a complete passion—a mania. But, of her, in her proper turn. Begin we with the eldest. Etheldreda Rokeby was of a kindly, affectionate, but, to all appearance, undemonstrative disposition; yet, her heart was brimful of warm, benevolent impulses. Pride of blood was, in her, tempered by a cool judgment and well-regulated mind; but, at the same time, no one could

have a more thorough horror of a *mésalliance* than Miss Etheldreda !

She had once been a wit and a beauty, but, owing to youthful coquetry and fastidious caprice, had destroyed her chance of wedded happiness with the gentleman to whom she was engaged, by causing a duel, in which her lover was killed. For a long time after this melancholy event, Miss Rokeby entirely secluded herself from society, and when she did once more appear in the world, it was no longer as the brilliant wit, or proud young beauty—but, as the gentle, subdued, yet dignified woman we find her now. There are, it must be allowed, few remains of loveliness in the tall, spare figure, and sharp pale features of Etheldreda Rokeby ; yet, neither time nor age can quite rob her of the natural grace of her movements, the high, noble profile, and delicate fineness of the skin. As for her hand, albeit, she is upwards of sixty years of age, it still retains that fresh, rosy tinge within the

soft palm, for which she had been celebrated in the bright hey-day of youth.

Vanity of her hand was Miss Rokeby's only little weakness. May it not be excused ?

Next come we to Miss Sacharissa, who was almost ten years younger than Etheldreda and her twin-brother, Sir Ranulph.

Sacharissa Rokeby was in every respect an unpleasant contrast to her elder sister.

Plain, coarse, and masculine, in appearance, she possessed an infinite proportion of innate ceaving for admiration and thirst after notoriety, neither of which would *her* beauty or wit gain for her. Nevertheless, nothing daunted, Miss Sacharissa determined on obtaining notice and attention by some means or other, ; so, she decided on studying for a high place amongst the Eccentrics. And remarkably well did she succeed in her labours, for a more unbearable, disagreeable, bearish female could not be found in the county of Kent ; no,

nor in Surrey, nor Suffolk, nor Middlesex, nor Essex either

Miss Sacharissa detested woman's society ;—despised their employments and accomplishments, save drawing ; longed to be a substantial yeoman, or whipper-in to the West-Kent hounds ; broke-in horses which had already broken several necks ; walked about over ploughed fields in her brother's shooting-shoes and leather-gaiters ; overlooked the stable and dog-kennel arrangements ; superintended the drainage of the Rokeby estate ; cracked jokes with the gamekeeper, rather of the broadest ; used strong language against poachers and vermin ; invented a new patent man-trap ; read all the medical, theological, agricultural, and political works she could lay her hands upon ; called flowers weeds ; declared that perfumes were unwholesome and deleterious stenches ; never ate anything but ' good English, roast and boiled ; ' wished that France, and, indeed, the Continent in general, might take the cholera

said she; talked mainly of the 'rights of the people'; answered mathematical and arithmetical puzzles in the magazines; rejoined in plain, forcible language, &c., &c., &c.

And with all this, Sacharissa was prouder than Lucifer; but proud, only, of her own name—her own race.

"*Aut Rokeby, aut nil!*" The nobles in the county were as nought in her eyes. None were truly great or noble, save the Rokebys of Rokeby Place. To her, there was nothing ill-assorted in the union of a De Courcy of Elverland with the daughter of Shirley the Cotton-Spinner. A De Courcy might marry whomsoever he, or she, pleased. A De Courcy was not a *Rokeby*!

Thus much of sweet Sacharissa.

Thirdly and lastly, come we to Miss Cassandra, the junior of the above lady by about three or four years.

Cassandra Rokeby was neither plain nor good-looking; i. e. she was most painfully in-

insipid. Her character, if such it could be called, was made up of nothings and negatives. It is a difficult matter to describe such a being as this.

All I can say, is—she was primly-lackadaisical, prudishly-sentimental, and antiquatedly-romantic. Much given was she to holding her tongue, and spelling over old-school novels; had read through Madame Cotin's "*Mathilde*," "Caroline of Lichfield," and the "Sorrows of Werter," five times each, and had been affected to tears exactly at the same scenes, on every fresh perusal. Add, that Miss Cassandra had no temper whatever; was devoted to knitting, netting, and knotting, besides the construction of bead-bracelets; was never caught leaning or bending out of the perpendicular, in the very least degree, even when most touched by the sickly sorrows of her favorites, Mesdames and Messrs. Caroline de Lichfield, Charlotte, Mathilde, Malek Adhel, and Werter; and, that

she always looked, acted, and spoke like a gentlewoman—then, fair Cassandra Rokeby's portrait is complete ; at least, so far as in us lies to paint an individual so *unpronounced*. By-the-bye, to make the picture quite complete, we must not forget to place Dido in the scanty lap of her mistress ! The pause which followed Miss Sacharissa's last flood of eloquence was broken by the timid Cassandra, who, in a voice only just above the *Annie-Laurie*-whisper, ventured to address Mrs. Wiley, beginning again at the starting point of the post-prandial conversation.

"The Shirley family, then, positively visit at Vale Court?"

"So it appears, Miss Cassandra," replied Sophia, delighted once more to hear the music of her own melodious utterance, "as I tell you—we met Sir Robert in Hollow Lane, on his way to the Court."

"Perhaps he was going there on business,

madam?" suggested Miss Cassandra, with firm solemnity.

"Pardon me; his purpose was to ask my Lord Elverland to name a day for dining at Oakstone Park."

"I must own, my dear madam," said Miss Rokeby, "that I am in no slight degree astonished at your information. How can it have been brought about? Colonel and Lady Claudia Vandeleur honored us with their company at dinner yesterday, and when I, by chance, mentioned Lady Shirley's name, whilst enumerating the patronesses of the projected alms-houses at Calverley, Lady Claudia said, in her peculiarly lively way—'Oh, pray, Miss Rokeby! do not speak of that magnificent gentlewoman, if you wish to enlist *me* beneath the banner of the Calverley widows.' It is most amazing, Mrs. Wiley."

"So it is," returned Sophia; "and what you have just told me, Miss Rokeby, puzzles me more and more."

An electrifying peal at the door-bell here startled the conclave, and Miss Sacharissa, taking up her pencil and sketch, rose from the table, smiling scornfully to herself; and with a more masculine gait even than usual, strode from the room, without, for an instant, suffering her eyes to rest upon the three other ladies.

Bang! went the door behind her; *such* a bang, that little, unsubstantial Miss Cassandra, together with the numerous China dragons, mandarins, pagodas, and other brittle monstrosities of the *ancien regime*, with which the pink-drawing-room was adorned, danced involuntarily upon their respective resting-places.

"Sir Samuel, I suppose," murmured Cassandra, looking mysteriously at her sister.

"Ehem!" was Miss Etheldreda's only reply.

And then she slightly shook her head at Miss Cassandra, contracted her brow for half

an instant, and glanced sideways at Mrs. Dionysius.

None of these specimens of pantomimic talent were, of course, intended for the visitor's edification or observation; but trust Sophia Wiley for seeing everything she ought *not* to see!

What *nuts*—to use an elegant expression—would that sudden exit of Miss Sacharissa's, that exclamation of Miss Cassandra's, that head-shaking and side-long glance of Miss Etheldreda's, be, for many a day to come, to the Major's lady.

This was the sort of food, which the intellectual Sophia loved as dearly to feed upon, even, as *Maintenon* cutlets and "cunning confections."

"Now that Sacharissa is gone," resumed Miss Cassandra, "I will venture to tell you, sister Etheldreda, that I heard her last evening, entirely out of contradiction, I should

suppose, bepraising that Miss Shirley to Lord Elverland to such a degree that I quite felt uncomfortable. And she likewise said that young Mr. Vernon was desperately attached to the lady, but that—”

“I heard the rest myself,” interrupted Miss Rokeby, hastily; “do not repeat it, Cassandra. I scarcely ever felt more annoyed, or amazed—I may say, ashamed of our sister—speaking as she did of such a splendid old line as that of Vernon of Vernondale.”

“Ladies!” exclaimed Mrs. Wiley, laying down her knitting, with an important and mysterious smile.

“La! you quite terrified me, I protest, madam,” simpered Miss Cassandra, “such a *very* sudden ejaculation.”

“What is it, my dear madam?” asked Miss Etheldreda.

“What should you say, ladies,” cried Mrs. Dionysius, her smile expanding into deeper im-

portance every instant, "what should you say, if my Lord Elverland is really making up to Freddie Shirley?"

"My good lady," exclaimed Miss Rokeby, looking incredulous and a little scandalized, "it cannot be."

"Time will show," rejoined the sage Sophia, resuming her knitting with the air of one who flatters herself that she can see farther through a brick-wall than the generality of her neighbours, "time will show, ladies."

"But, on what authority or supposition—" began Miss Cassandra.

"A merefancy of mine—a merefancy of mine," answered Mrs. Wiley, "founded, certainly, upon a few observations I have been enabled to make lately, or, that I have gathered from others. Mark me, ladies—"

Another ring at the hall-door bell, and in a minute or two, the Countess of Stalsfield, and the Ladies Jane and Alicia Fitz-Walter were announced.

Mrs. Dionysius Wiley, who chose to imagine that these magnates invariably "turned their noses up" at her when, by any unusual chance, she encountered them, begged permission of Miss Rokeby to have her *carriage* ordered, as the rain had almost ceased. No opposition was made to this proposal, and the Majoreess consequently took her departure as soon as "Vel-linton hand the shay" were ready.

Just as she was handed into her equipage by the powdered butler, and had taken her seat beside one of Sir Ranulph's dapper grooms—(not a little to the satisfaction of our Sophy, for she took much delectation in being driven through the village-street of Calverley by a Rokeby livery)—who was to act as her Jehu, a couple of equestrians flew across the stable-yard, close in front of her, and leaping the ha-ha, were soon half over Rokeby Chase.

"Well, I'm blessed if our Miss Sacchy aint a reg'lar stunner a-hosback!" involuntarily exclaimed the admiring son of the rack and

manger, gazing after the riders. "But, I ask yer parding, mum, I couldn't 'elp takin' notice o' that ere performance.'

"Miss Sacchy !" repeated Mrs. Wiley, with a dignified, yet condescending bow, in acknowledgement of John's apology ; "was *that* Miss Sacharissa, Mills ?"

"Yes, it were, mum, if ye please."

"And the gentleman, Mills ?"

"Sir Samivel Culpepper, mum ; Sir Ranulph's cuzzing."

"Ah ! yes, Mills—*exactly*—Sir Ranulph's cousin."

Here were nuts—*more* nuts—*delicious* nuts—for our dear Mrs. Dionysius Wiley !

CHAPTER XVIII.

Thine is a face to look upon, and pray
That a pure spirit keep thee.

N. P. WILLIS.

You are thrice welcome to our humble walls.
You do us honor.

Golden Legend.

WHAT a very lovely day did the following Monday prove. Bright and sunny as August, although it was the beginning of September. Not a cloud in the sky. Not a ripple on the deep waters of my Lady Shirley's satisfaction. For, lo! Sir Robert—(or "Robin," as he had

now been uniformly called for many hours by the Empress of his heart!—had been to Vale Court—had been admitted—had seen Lord Elverland—had been introduced to Colonel and Lady Claudia Vandeleur—and had returned home with the delightful assurance, given by the Lady Claudia's own sweet lips, accompanied by so sweet a smile, (but oh! so sour a will,) that she, with her two liege knights, would ride over to Oakstone Park on the following Monday, to call on Lady and Miss Shirley—if fine.

And fine it was. No day in September could be finer.

Add to this, an invitation to a ball at Calverley Castle, just received from the Countess of Stalsfield.

Put *this* and *that* together, and, surely, any one who knows Thomasina Shirley so well as we do, can, at all events, in some degree, enter into the jubilancy of her feelings on this glorious and auspicious morn.

As for Frederica—she knew not *how* she felt. Happy she was not. And, yet would not Noel Vernon return to the Warren ere long? And had he not promised to visit Oakstone Park then? What might not that visit bring about? But, ah! the suspense. Might she hope? Had she any grounds for hope? Did she *really* love Noel Vernon? Were his attentions to her prompted by anything more than gallantry and admiration?

Poor Frederica now, too, sensibly began to feel, despite all “mama’s lessons,” that her little heart was inclined to be a very weak, and fond, and tiresome little heart—exceedingly like the little hearts she had read of, and been taught by her lady-mother—and a fashionable governess—to look upon as fabulous creations of the novelist’s and poet’s brain. Ambitious, Frederica certainly was, but not innately so.

Ambition, in her, was a foreign seed sown in good English soil, which had grown up rapidly, and spread into a tree. Then, it was

forced into blossom by the artificial heat, and exciting means, applied at the hands of Lady Shirley and her assistant gardener, the worldly *gouvernante*.

But now the tree begins to look sickly, and to droop its leaves. Why is this?

The ground in which the seed is imbedded is too rich for it.

The *natural* warmth and richness of the soil are destroying the lightly-fixed roots of the exotic tree.

That warmth—that richness—are the growing love of a woman's heart.

* * * * *

It is now high luncheon at Oakstone Park. Seated at the head of the table is my Lady Shirley, supported on either side by Colonel Vandeleur and the Earl of Elverland.

At the lower end of the table smiles Sir

Robert between the Lady Claudia Vandeleur and his own beautiful daughter. Frederica had never looked so truly lovely before. Her usually restless, brilliant, dark eyes were now softened in their expression by the new feelings which had so lately sprung up in her heart; and there was a well-bred repose, a gentle dignity, in her manner, particularly when she was addressed by Lord Elverland—which made Lady Claudia begin to regard her as an *eighth* wonder of the world—*such* a mother as the poor girl was *blessed* with!

“Can that elegant, splendid creature,” Lady Claudia found herself thinking all on a sudden, “with her small Grecian head and noble profile, be indeed the daughter of this little old cotton-man, and that huge, odious, vulgar woman? She *must* have patrician blood in those delicate violet veins, which show so distinctly through the fine, clear skin!”

If, then, this most utterly fastidious of all

fastidious Lady Claudias could be thus struck with Frederica Shirley, what was the Earl of Elverland ?

"Are you partial to peaches, Colonel?" asked Lady Shirley.

"Exceedingly so."

"Then, I think you now have the opportunity of tasting the finest in England. Permit me to assist you."

"Our peaches ought to be fine," added Sir Robert, "for we have spared no expense to make them so. Your ladyship had better try one; you will find it delicious eating. Thomasina, my dear, we musn't forget to send some to the Countess of Stalsfield."

"I am *obleegeed*—ehem!—ah!—obliged to you, Sir Robert, for reminding me," returned Lady Shirley, who coughed down the '*obleegeed*' as well as she could.

"We ought, I'm sure, to be generous to the Countess," she continued, addressing Colonel

Vandeleur, "with our fruit, for we bought her chief gardener over her head."

"*Bought her chief gardener over her head!*" repeated Lady Claudia repeated to herself. "Oh! that I should be sitting at the table of a woman who can be guilty of such a speech! How can Horace look so calmly well-pleased at her, and listen so smilingly to her incessant trumpet-soundings? *I—I—I—We—we—we!* Plutus! Plutus! thou art, at the best, a most plebeian deity!"

And how felt Frederica, whilst listening to the parental cross-fire of bits of bad taste and ostentation going on at both ends of the table?"

A month—nay, a few days ago—she would have been ready to sink into the earth with chagrin; and even now, her cheek had more than once crimsoned for her mother's pompous grandiloquence, and her father's empty, civic nothings. But her mind was too much pre-

occupied, at present, to allow of her being very much disturbed about anything ; and moreover, Lord Elverland engaged her attention so continually with his lively, sparkling anecdotes, that she had not the opportunity of hearing half the magnificent things which her mother was pouring into Colonel Vandeleur's ear, concerning the possessions and treasures pertaining unto the house of Shirley of Oakstone.

Not so was it with the Lady Claudia, however.

She was storing up, in the garner of her terribly-retentive memory, every word that was uttered, with a view to favouring her beloved cousin, the Duchess of Olney (Elverland's second sister), with a highly-seasoned *réchauffé* in her next weekly budget of chit-chat.

" I can call to mind having had the honor of seeing your ladyship, once and again, in

London during the last season," observed Sir Robert, waxing friendly.

"Very probably," replied Lady Claudia, vaguely.

Sooth to say, she was getting peevishly tired of her obsequious host, and the visit altogether ; and once more determined on representing, in the most glaring colours, to "Planty," the "weight of woe" he would entail on himself and all the branches, together with the distant off-shoots of the noble De Courcy tree, by an alliance with Frederica Shirley.

Not but what the afore-named Frederica was—in her own proper person—as far as could be seen by Lady Claudia on so brief an acquaintance—perfectly unexceptionable !

But, oh ! the papa and mama !

The "delicious-eating"—the "call-to-mind"—the "once-and-again"—and *behind-the-counterish* politeness of the one ; and the "oblegged"—and "bought-her-chief-gardener-over-her-

head" of the other !—These were only *pattern* specimens. What *must* be behind !

"Little enough did I think," continued Sir Robert, sipping his Moselle, "when I last had the pleasure of seeing your ladyship at the Opera, that I should ever be so honored as I am to-day ! My lady, permit me to re-fill my glass, and drink to your ladyship's *first* visit to Oakstone Park, in a bumper !"

"The *first*, but not the *last*, I hope," said Lady Shirley, smiling a triangular smile on her guests.

"*Last !*" echoed Sir Robert, enthusiastically, "I hope not, indeed ! Colonel—here's your very good health, and may yours, and your honored lady's first visit to Oakstone Park not be the last ! My Lord Elverland—*yours* is *not* a *first visit*—but here's to our often meeting ; and success attend your lordship in all your busi—ehem !—your undertakings ! Thoma-

sina — Freddie, my dear—my love to ye both !”

Of course Lady Claudia bowed, and the Colonel bowed, and the Earl bowed ; but the Lady Shirley knit her brows ominously ; and poor Frederica could have cried with vexation.

She perceived that to Lady Claudia, at all events, her parents were objects of silent satire and quizzical observation.

Frederica could plainly see how totally unfitted were both father and mother, by habit and education, to associate with the noble and *exclusive* of the land ; and—although, we fear, she did not *honor* her parents in any very great degree—especially her mother—yet, her pride and natural, inborn affection alike revolted at the idea of their being made laughing-stocks for those whose wit and station placed them on so high a pinnacle in the scale of society.

Frederica’s perception was not far wrong,

for Lady Claudia could not refrain from a stolen glance of mischief at her husband, whilst the little knight was toasting the party, which glance did not escape Frederica.

In an instant, her large eyes flashed, and her cheek turned crimson.

Lady Claudia, too, saw that she had been observed, and her kindly, but spoiled, *fashionable* heart, rebuked her for having given pain to that beautiful and queen-like girl.

"She is fit to be a countess !" she mentally exclaimed.

The Lady Claudia's sensitive ear again caught another of Lady Shirley's *magnificences*, and all Frederica's perfections immediately vanished "*in fumo*," in the estimation of the fastidious daughter of aristocracy.

"You may easily imagine, Colonel Vandeleur, that Lady Stalsfield, with her large family, cannot, though she is a countess, show up with me in *that* respect !"

"*Show up !*" was instantly added to Lady Claudia's *répertoire* of Shirleian Elegant Extracts.

"Of course, your ladyship will honor Lord Stalsfield's ball on Friday week?" said Sir Robert.

"We are invited," was the reply.

"Only to think of fixing on a Friday, of all days in the week!" exclaimed Lady Shirley, involuntarily giving utterance to one of the "Popular Delusions" of the now *tabooed* Mrs. Betsey Crookshanks.

"Have you, then, a sailor-like dread of that much-maligned day, Lady Shirley?" asked Colonel Vandeleur.

"Well, I hardly know what to say, Colonel; but I rather fancy I have. I remember that it was on a certain Friday, two-and-twenty years ago, that my aunt—"

Frederica coughed slightly, and her mother took the hint.

"The Castle ball will be a very splendid

affair, I suppose, Lady Claudia?" resumed Thomasina, immediately trying a fresh tack.

"I should imagine so, Lady Shirley."

"A vast number of people will be there, no doubt?"

"Half the county," replied Lady Claudia, languidly.

"Dear me!—*Half the county!* How delightful!"

"A general gathering," resumed the fair Vandeleur; "the Earl, as Lord Lieutenant, or whatever he is called, is, of course, obliged to bring together, once a year, all those of his loyal subjects who have the slightest claim to respectability. Besides, just now he has set his heart on his son, Lord Leybourne, standing for the county at the next election; so he is doubly bound to play the civil to all the creatures who can command votes. A charming assemblage there will be at the ball on Friday week!"

Lady Shirley did not at all relish this

speech ; neither did Frederica, who was just in the frame of mind to discover a hidden sting in each word and look of the Lady Claudia Vandeleur.

“ No—really, now, Colonel,” exclaimed Lady Shirley, as she observed Lady Claudia make a sign for departure to her husband, “ you must *not* go till you have seen my foreign plants and birds. Indeed, you mustn’t.”

“ But we have to call at Rokeby Place and the Castle,” pleaded Lady Claudia, rising, “ before we return home.”

“ Plenty of time for that, Claudia, an hour hence,” said Lord Elverland, determined not to be disappointed, if possible, of a *tête-à-tête* with his gazelle-eyed beauty in the gardens.

Planty had made up his mind to play a very “ forward game,” and not to waste a moment unnecessarily.

“ But, remember, Plantagenet, we dine at the Beauchamps’.”

“ The Beauchamps to-morrow, I believe, fair

cousin. Perhaps *you* can tell us which day it is, Horace ?”

“The *invitation* is for *to-morrow*,” answered Vandeleur, with one of his quietly-arch smiles at his little wife.

“Ah ! yes—by-the-bye—to-morrow,” stammered Lady Claudia, wofully disconcerted by the effrontery of Elverland in having thus boldly defeated her *ruse*.

“So, so, Master Planty !” soliloquized she, “but I will outwit you, yet, for your impertinence ; and spoil your sentimental garden-ramble, most indubitably !”

Colonel Vandeleur was, now, in politeness bound to declare how charmed he should be to explore the paradise of beauties, of which report spoke so enthusiastically. A general rise from the table followed.

“How could you be such a stupid old fool as to dream of drinking healths ? Such a thing is never heard of in fashionable society,”

signify scattered Lady Shirley to poor Sir Robert, as he was opening her parcel for her.

"But, my dear ——"

"Pooh! Such abominable vulgarity!"

"Vulgarity! My dear Thomalina, you ——"

"Hush! hush! hold your silly, obstinate tongue, or they'll hear what we are saying. Get along—do!"

And then, with an urbane smile, Lady Shirley turned to the Colonel, who offered his arm, and they proceeded towards the gardens, followed by Sir Robert and Lady Claudia, Lord Elverland, and Frederica.

CHAPTER XIX.

Carlos—She's full of pretty little elvish tricks
That make you love her, though you fain would
hold !

Miser of Madrid.

As in a dream
I see him here, and scarce believe my eyes.

DEYDEN.

THE gardens at Oakstone Park were, indeed, splendid—beautiful as “gold-purchased art” could make them ! But, alas ! the elderly Eve of this Eden destroyed more than half their enchantment, by every instant *pointing*

out with her substantial, be-gemmed finger every object around, without allowing the eye to discover anything for itself. And, worse than all, she kept up a running account of what this, or that, had *cost*!

It was impossible to forget, even for a moment, despite the delicately-imitated *Nature* of the delicious scene, that you were walking in a garden made by man's hands, and that good, hard-cash had been paid for each "bosky dell," or "flowery bank," that met the view. Useless were the attempts of Lord Elverland to linger behind the rest with Frederica; Lady Claudia *would* keep up such a continued fire of conversation with her; so, the little party, one and all, arrived at the tropical conservatory—Lady Shirley's chief, and most expensive, boast—at the same time.

"Oh!" faintly ejaculated Lady Claudia, suddenly leaning rather heavily on old Sir Robert's arm, while she wrinkled her fair forehead, and bit her under-lip.

"My dear lady! what is it?" cried Sir Robert, all in a twitter, "what *is* the matter? Are you going to faint?"

"No! no! I am not unwell, thank you; but I have, in some extraordinary way, twisted my ankle."

"Dear me! dear me!" exclaimed the gallant Knight of Oakstone, "it must have been this pebble," (stooping to pick it up, and examining it curiously), "how could Williams have overlooked it when sweeping down these steps this morning? Pray, sit down, my dear madam!—pray, sit down!"

"Oh! not here! not here! Sir Robert—the heat of this conservatory would kill me in two minutes!"

"The pony-chair must be sent for immediately," said Lady Shirley, "run, Sir Robert! and look for one of the gardeners. Mc. Dougal is in the Orangery."

"Nay, nay!" interrupted Lady Claudia, who, to speak truth, was as well able to walk

as ever she had been in her life, "indeed, Lady Shirley, I would not think of giving so much trouble. I can easily walk to the house with assistance."

"But, really, my dear girl —" began Colonel Vandeleur.

"But, really, my dear Horace," interrupted Lady Claudia, smiling, but not altogether allowing the well-assumed expression of pain to vanish from her pretty face, "you know nothing at all about it. I insist on your not wasting your time and words on me, when you ought to be enjoying the beauties of this delightful place. Pray, take him away, Lady Shirley, if you would oblige me !"

A peculiar glance, which the Colonel caught from the bright eyes of his little lady, fully satisfied him that the twisted ankle was a myth and, therefore, with a suppressed laugh, he turned towards Lady Shirley.

Colonel Vandeleur was well up in these *petites ruses* of his *carina sponsina* ; and so he ought to

have been, for they were not "like angel-visits !"

"Now, *do* let me send for the pony-chair," entreated Sir Robert, once more, "I'm sure you cannot walk !"

"Yes, indeed, I can, Sir Robert !" persisted Lady Claudia, retaking her late respectable supporter's arm, "Plantagenet, come you on the other side ! There—that will do. Now, Lady Shirley, let me entreat you not to accompany us back to the house. Colonel Vandeleur will be so sadly disappointed, if he do not thoroughly inspect these tropical gems, having himself been in the East."

So, with many amiable speeches, and kindly cautions to the *lame* lady, the Eve of the Garden of Oakstone proceeded on her triumphant way with the botanical Colonel, leaving the others to walk slowly back to the house.

Sir Robert was all happiness and would-be gallantry ; Lord Elverland all sulks and cha-

grin ; and Frederica all attention and sympathy, in spite of the quizzical glance detected at luncheon.

As for Claudia Vandeleur, she was enjoying inwardly a mischievous laugh with a wicked little imp in her heart, at the success of her vengeful stratagem against her offending kinsman.

"Now, gentleman," said Frederica, as soon as Lady Claudia was comfortably reclined on a couch in a drawing-room which opened upon the lawn, her exquisite little feet just peeping out from the folds of her riding-habit, one of them, (the *injured* one,) resting on a velvet cushion, "I think we can dispense with your farther attendance for the present. Can we not, Lady Claudia?"

The *sufferer* bowed assent, thanking Sir Robert and her cousin for their kind support, so that the old knight and his would-be-son-in-law could do no other than exit at once again into

the garden, the latter looking so utterly *distract* and "sold," that Lady Claudia longed to laugh outright.

"Poor Planty !" thought she, "I wonder if he suspects my 'Belle's Stratagem?'"

"Does your ankle feel easier now?" asked Frederica.

"Oh! yes, thank you, Miss Shirley," replied Claudia, looking up, with one of her sweetest smiles; "the strain was a mere nothing—not worth speaking of."

"But I had better get a bandage for you, Lady Claudia? Remember, you have a ride before you—unless you will take one of the carriages to Vale Court."

"Indeed, my dear Miss Shirley, I do not require either bandage or carriage, I assure you. Come and sit on this couch by me. There—there is plenty of room, now that I have moved my feet."

And Lady Claudia spoke and looked so differently to what Frederica had before heard

or seen her, that as she sat down, she asked herself—

“Can this be the supercilious, affected little woman, who annoyed me so much at luncheon? How gentle—how loveable—how childlike—she looks now !”

“What have you in this frame, Miss Shirley?” asked Lady Claudia, lifting a handkerchief from a large piece of work that stood close by her; “a St. Cecilia, I perceive; and most exquisitely done, too. But—are my eyes still dazzled by the sun?—or—no! This cherub positively has green eyes, Miss Shirley! Is it a kind of *artiste’s* licence which you have adopted? A most novel idea of yours, I must own—this green eyed cherub !”

Poor Frederica blushed up to her temples, and made a lame attempt at a playful reply.

“I suppose,” resumed Lady Claudia, laughing heartily, “that these verdant orbs are designed as a delicate compliment to the fair

saint, insomuch, that even an angelic songster was moved to jealousy, when

Chaste Cecilia raised th' harmonious strain !

Is it so, Miss Shirley ?”

“I—I—” stammered Frederica, who had forgotten all about her 'broidery-work for the last few days, “it was a little mistake—but—If you will excuse me for a minute or two, I will show you a large piece I have lately completed, which is much better worth being looked at.”

And without waiting for any reply, she quickly left the room, glad to escape the arch-glance which, with deluding self-consciousness, she almost imagined, could see, through her blushes the scarcely-to-herself-acknowledged secret of her heart.

Lady Clandia gazed after Frederica admiringly.

"Yes, she is strikingly beautiful, and so superior! What might not be made of her, if she could but be removed from all intercourse with the old cotton-spinner and his terrific *sposa*?"

"The father certainly, is not so outrageously bad, after all. He really might pass for a gentleman in some humdrum country-town circle."

"*But* that Thomasina—fearful woman!"

"How *could* she become the mother of such a daughter?"

"Poor, beautiful, Frederica! thou art like a fair flower, growing beneath the poisonous boughs of a upas tree!"

"Heigho! it's really a thousand pities!"

Her ladyship's train of thought was here put a stop to, by her hearing a quick but heavy step behind her.

Turning her head, she beheld an elderly

male personage bounding into the room, through the open French window, his hat in one hand, and a large red and yellow silk pocket-handkerchief in the other, with which latter he was industriously wiping "the plentiful moisture," from his ample face.

In height, the large apparition was about six feet, and in bulk—Lady Claudia Vandeleur had once seen that interesting object, a prize ox, which was now most forcibly recalled to her recollection by the figure of the moist and obese stranger.

His costume consisted of a blue coat, curiously cut," ("ehem ! Shakespeare !"), and adorned with those obsolete ornaments, ycleped brass buttons ; a buff kerseymere waistcoat ; voluminous white cravat ; broad-frilled shirt, in the front of which loomed a great, dismal, mourning-brooch containing a love-knot of red hair ; drab continuations and gaiters ; stout shoes ; no gloves ; a very handsome diamond ring ; and a long myrtle-green watch ribbon, sus-

pending a bunch of golden sundries, which dangled half down to his knees.

"Aha! Miss Freddie!" vociferated the old gentleman (for he looked about sixty,) in the sort of tones you might expect from Gog and his "frequent pardner," in the Guildhall, were they to be endowed with the gift of elocution. "Aha! 'ow d'e do to-day, my dear?"

Lady Claudia stared, and began to think the intruder must be an inebriated gardener in his Sunday clothes. As he approached the couch, she hastily assumed a sitting posture.

"Oh! it aint you, aint it? I hask yer pard'n, ma'am," said the unknown, discovering his mistake, "I've n't the pleasure of knowin' of you, but I ope I see ye well, ma'am?"

Lady Claudia bowed in silent astonishment, as the new arrival plunged into an easy chair near her, and putting his low-crowned hat on the carpet before him, continued to mop his oleaginous countenance.

"This here's terrible tryin' weather, for the time o'year, pertiklerly to a man o'my stone," he gasped, as he fanned himself with the flaming pocket-handkerchief, "it takes it hout o'ye preciously, ma'am!"

"*Can* this be a relation?" thought Lady Claudia, in a perfect fever of dismay at the awful possibility.

"But where's Sir Bobby, and my lady, and Miss Freddie?" asked the old gentleman, "I'spose you've seen'em, as I found you so werry much at'ome with yer tidy little bits of feet tucked up cosily on the sofer?"

"Miss Shirley will be here directly, sir, I believe," replied Lady Claudia, rising from the couch, with the intention of making her escape from her familiar companion.

"No, don't be so crule as to go and leave me alone," cried he, making Lady Claudia reseat herself, by taking her hand, and pulling her back, with what was meant for playful gallantry.

"Sir !" exclaimed the lady, the blood of the Granbys and De Courcys mounting to her forehead.

"Ah ! I see you don't know me, ma'am," said the stranger, with a coarse but good-humoured laugh, "no offence, my dear young lady ! Here let me interdooce myself, and then we shall get along, like a house a-fire !"

And here he took from his coat-pocket a largescarlet-moroccocase, bursting with papers, from which he drew a glazed card, and placed it in Lady Claudia's lap.

"Cruttenden & Son,' you see, ma'am, late 'Gibbs, Cruttenden, and Gibbs, Soap-Boilers, 'Thames Street !' Now you see where you are ma'am. I—old Jacob Cruttenden, at yer service—was partners with David and Peter Gibbs, my lady's uncle and father ; but when *they* dropped, I took in my boy, Jack. Jack'll be here presently, and I'm sure he'll be proud to make your acquaintance, Miss ; for I don't

know a young fellow as likes a pretty gurl better than my son, Jack! I'spose you know ma'am, as he's got a h'eye to Freddie Shirley? She's a doocid nice gurl, Freddie is! but rayther too uppish, or so, for a tradesman's wife. But, there—a family of youngker's about her will pretty soon fetch hall such nonsense hout of her. He! he! he!"

And old Cruttenden looked so knowing, and winked so pleasantly, that Lady Claudia could bear it no longer.

"*Will* you allow me to pass, sir?" she exclaimed haughtily, again rising from her seat.

At this crisis the door opened and Frederica entered, carrying a large roll of tapestry-work.

"I must apologise again and again, for having left you so long, Lady Claudia," she said, as she turned to close the door, not having as yet observed the presence of Jacob

Cruttenden, a large Indian screen shutting him and Claudia from her view.

But when Frederica *did* see them—the patrician lady of Vale Court standing up with flushed cheek and proud eye, and the old Soap-Boiler of Thames Street, lounging back in an amber-damask chair beside her—she stood as still as Lot's punished wife.

She was, what is called, completely dumb-founded.

What a *contre-temps* !

What *should* she do ? What should she say ?

"Why, Freddie, my lass !" shouted Jacob, starting up, and seizing Miss Shirley by the shoulders, "you look a bit flabbergasted—didn't'spect to see me, did ye ? Come, put down that lump o' trumpery and give us yer'and ! 'Ow are ye, Freddie ? you don't look well, my gurl. And'ow's Sir Bobby an'ma ?"

"Quite well, I thank you, Mr. Cruttenden," replied poor Frederica, wishing old Jacob ten-thousand miles off.

Lady Claudia Vandeleur, observing Miss Shirley's painful embarrassment, and heartily pitying her, said, as she kindly took her hand, and then went towards the window—

"I will go in search of the rest of the party now, for it must be getting late."

"But your ankle, Lady Claudia?"

"Oh, it is quite well, now—*au revoir*!"

And as Claudia disappeared into the garden, with a kind smile which made her look like an angel, the offending glance at luncheon was for ever banished from Frederica's grateful heart.

"*Lady*, did you call her, Freddie?"

"Yes, Mr. Cruttenden."

"What! is she one of the quality—a ladyship?"

"The lady who has just left the room is

the wife of Colonel Vandeleur, and the Duke of Grandsmore's daughter."

" Phew-w-w-w !"

A protracted whistle from old Jacob.

"Then, I'm blest if I've'n't rayther put my foot in it, Fred ! But how should I know who she was ? I thought sure it was one o'your parson's gurls. Howsomever, 'least said's soonest mended;' aint it, my dear ? I'ope'er ladyship didn't take it huncivil o'me, a bein'so precious fameeliar in my goins-on. But there—whether she did, or whether she didn't, aint no odds, now. 'What's done, cant be hundone,' you know, Freddie ! And now for a pleasant surprise for ye, my gurl ! Priscy an' Jack, an' Priscy's beau, Liftenant Strong, are all on the way down'ere. Priscy, ye know's a-goin' to be married—united *she* calls it—o' Monday week—that's to-day fortnit—and so, I thought we'd jest show hup the Liftenant to Sir Bobby, and yer Mar, and you,

Freddie, afore we asked ye to the wedd'n. He's a fine, square-set, *nautil* chap, Nelson is! None o'yer fiddle-faddle, dan'cin'-master sort o'fellers, like young 'Dolphus Fipps—By the-bye, you know Dolly's a sort of a cousin o'your's, Freddie—his Mar, as he calls old Nancy, was a Crookshanks. The Liftenant's a *nautil* character—a Navy-man, ye know—but he's jist bin an had a mint o'money left'im by 'is h'Uncle, Tim Strong the late alderman—him as narried Polly Samson—so, ye see, Nelson 'asn't no call to go to sea agen. Him an' Pris'll 'ave a tidy penny betwixt'em. But, I say, 'ow's this? I can't think why they don't arrive. They started a deal before me, in the Liftenant's noo pheaton, 'cause I couldn't get away from bizness quite so soon as they did; and so, I come h'off by the rail down to Norley, and then cut across the fields to this 'ere place."

"I did not hear your knock or ring," remarked Frederica, who felt that she must say something.

"Most like you didn't, my dear; for, ye see, I met one o' Sir Bobby's gardeners a-comin 'down *Oller Lane*, I think it's called, and he let me in through the shrubry."

At this moment, an alarming bang at the knocker, and a no less startling tug at the door-bell, caused old Cruttenden to plunge once more into a standing position.

"Hooray! here they are. Now, then, Miss Freddie, prepare yerself to 'ear our Jack tell ye a specimen of his mind, ye little gipsy, ye!"

Poor Frederica!

How she wished she were only dreaming!

CHAPTER XX.

Prince of Morocco—What have we here ?

MERCHANT OF VENICE.

Katharina—I prythee, go, and get me some repast.

TAMING OF THE SHREW.

“MISS CRUTTENDEN and Lieutenant Strong !” exclaimed the insinuating Mr. Lawson, in his softly-modulated accents, but with an only half-repressed “laughing devil” in his eye, as he ushered in a lady and gentleman, who had evidently been, but too literally made to “bite the dust,” or, at all events, to roll in it !

The young lady, whose white-lace bonnet

and *cérise*-tipped *marabouts* were none the better for a 'bend sinister;' and whose delicate *bluette* silk dress, and lace *mantille*, each exhibited more than one "drag out of the gathers," and unseemly rent—was leaning languidly on the arm of a stout, red-face, red-haired gentleman, whose green 'cutaway' was almost minus one of its tails; and whose white 'continuations,' and primrose kids, were no longer like Kathleen's neck, "without freckle or speck," whatever they might have been an hour since.

And now for a grand *tableau* !

As Priscilla Cruttenden and her affianced enter the room in the deplorable pickle we have described—immediately opposite to them, appear Lady Shirley and Colonel Vandeleur, followed by Lady Claudia, Lord Elverland and Sir Robert, from the garden.

Between the two advancing parties stand poor Frederica and old Jacob.

In a moment all was confusion, consterna-

tion, hurry, and flurry, in the midst of which it was rather a difficult matter to learn, that, owing to the sudden apparition of a turkey-cock on the top of a wall with his '*gobble-de-gobble-de-gobble-de-gobble*,' the Lieutenant's steeds had taken fright and started off helter-skelter along the high-road, when a sharp turning caused the upset of the carriage and a roll in the dust for '*I Promessi Sposi* !' The latter, however, got off with merely a few slight bruises, and then finished their progress to Oakstone Park on foot, while the ill-fated phaeton-and-pair was housed, *pro-tem*, at the 'Ploughman's Delight.'

"But where's Jack?" vociferated old Jacob, "I say, Strong, what the dooce have ye done with Jack?"

"Brother changed his mind about coming," said Miss Priscilla, who was now reclining in an arm-chair, while the Lieutenant held a bottle of *eau-de-cologne* to her nose, with a look of the most loverlike devotion.

"The devil, he did!" thundered Cruttenden, "rot it! what did's do that for?"

"How can you be so monstrous unfeeling, Pa," moaned Priscilla, raising her laced *mouchoir* to her eyes, "as to ask so many questions, when I am in such a state as this? Oh, Nelson, I am *so* upset!"

"H'upset, indeed!" echoed Jacob, surlily, "there aint no doubt about that, as these'ere torn furbelows shows. A fine pair o' figgers *you* are to show up afore quality!"

Lady Shirley and her companions now approached the spot where sat the fair unfortunate, her face still hidden in her pocket-handkerchief, while Frederica was begging her to go up stairs and compose herself.

"Pooh! pooh! Nonsense, Miss Freddie!" resumed old Cruttenden, "she'll do well enow. Come, Pris; don't be a fool—rouse up, gurl—here's my Lady Charlotte Vindelore come to see ye."

Priscilla uttered a sobbing cry, at the idea of being seen in such a draggled state by a Lady Charlotte, and without more ado cast herself into a fit of hysterics, during the performance of which, the Vale Court party contrived to escape, but not before the hot-headed Earl had been thrown into a fume by seeing Lieutenant Strong slip a letter into Frederica's hand, with an 'aside' of—

“For your own eye, ma'am—from Mr. John Cruttenden.”

Poor Freddie ! Nothing but *contre-tems* !
How she crimsoned as she caught Lord Elverland's regards fixed upon her, as she nervously crumpled the letter in her hand.

“Well,” cried Jacob, when Miss Priscilla had somewhat recovered, “now that all your nonsense is over, gurl, s'pose I interdooce my son-in-law-as-it-is-to-be to my old friends, Sir Bobby and My Lady. But, hullo ! Sir Bob—where's yer better-arf ? What's come o' Ma, Freddie ?”

"I don't know, Mr. Cruttenden," replied Frederica.

She had, however, seen her mother sweep off, like a *simoom*, just after the departure of the Vandeleurs, and doubted not that a storm was brewing.

"Hah—well—never mind, ducky. My Lady'll be here agen in a crack, I'll warrant ; but, whether or no, Bobby, that's no reason why I shouldn't interdooce Priscy's beau to you an' Fred, is it? Here, Strong—leave go o' that gurl's 'and for a bit, and let's show ye to my old pal, Sir Robert Shirley of Oakstone Park, and his daughter, Miss Frederiker-Thomasiner-Roberter Shirley, who'll, one o' these fine days, I 'ope, be yer sis—"

Frederica's eyes flashed, and she drew herself up with an air of such contemptuous *hauteur*, that Jacob Cruttenden was, for a moment, silenced.

It was *but* for a moment.



"Highty-tighty! Why, Freddie, what's the matter, lass? Was she nettled a bit 'cos Jack didn't turn up? Eh, Missy—wasn't that it? Eh?"

"Your son's movements cannot concern me, Mr. Cruttenden," replied Frederica, curtly.

What with one annoyance and another, she felt almost as hysterical as Priscilla, whose hand was once more clasped in that of her beloved Nelson, whilst poor, bewildered, little Sir Robert stood fanning the agitated *citoyenne* with a sheet of music which he had found on the table.

"Hey-day, Miss Fred," blustered old Cruttenden, beginning, in his turn, to get rather waspish, "how uppish we are with our grand noo friends! Much good may they do ye, say I! But—ah—what's that in yer 'and, ye gipsy? A letter, by Jupiter! From our Jack, I bet sixpence! Aint I right now,

Strong? Didn't Pris or you bring that letter from Jack?"

"I did, sir," replied the Lieutenant, casting a facetious look at Frederica, which, however, was quite lost upon her, for her eyes were fixed on the carpet, as she struggled to conceal the feelings of vexation, anger, and disgust, which possessed her.

"Hah! well! that's all right," returned Cruttenden, laughing, "Freddie'll soon come round when she reads our Jack's *billy-doo*. But, dooce seize the boy, why didn't he come 'isself, instead o' scribblin'? Bah! all reg'lar gammon-an'-spinnidge! Jack had ought to ha' known as 'faint art never won fair lady.' Eh, Lifenant, aint it so? But you wasn't afraid, my lad, was ye? No, no, not you!"

The gallant officer, thus apostrophized, cast a triumphant smile at Priscilla, who returned it modestly through a loophole in her flaxen ringlets.

"But, come, Sir Bobby," continued old Crut, "I'm dooced peckish, I am; an', I dare say, Strong and Pris isn't fur off. What d'ye say to a bit o' lunchin'?"

"Ah—to be sure—yew—certainly," twittered Sir Robert, fidgetily, who, having shaken hands with the Lieutenant, had fallen into a pitiable and most perfect state of nonentityism.

He was reflecting on his lady's sudden exit, and too well divined that a tempest was in rehearsal.

"Well, then, I'll ring the bell, shall I?" said Jacob.

"By no means," cried Sir Robert, nervously, "that is—um—ah—pray don't trouble yourself."

"Trouble! pooh! nonsense, Sir Bobby! Don't be so precious perlite with a hold friend, or you'll make us think as you want us gone."

"True enough," sighed the poor little Knight to himself, "never did I wish anything so heartily in all my life!"

Where *could* Lady Shirley be!

What *would* become of him!

"There, now, Bobby, make yerself easy—that's done."

And old Cruttenden gave such a tug at the bell-rope, that Mr. Lawson, followed by two footmen, rushed at once into the room, looking "much blank astonishment."

"Oh—ah—um—" stammered Sir Robert, rolling and unrolling the sheet of music still in his hand, and looking as guilty before his august butler as though he were some small, apple-pilfering urchin in the clutches of the parish-beadle.

"What did you please to want, Sir Robert?" asked Mr. Lawson, in accents most patronising, as he waved to his attendant-sprites-in-livery to withdraw.

"Why—if you please, Lawson—we—I—that is—"

"We want some lunch, young man," said the sharp and decisive Crut, "that's what I pulled the bell for."

Lawson took not the slightest heed of Jacob, but stood with his eyes fixed upon his master.

"Yes—um—luncheon, Lawson."

"Luncheon, Sir Robert!" echoed Lawson, raising his arched eyebrows, with a look of most *naïve* surprise, "the luncheon has been removed these three quarters of an hour, Sir Robert."

"Then, remove it back again, sir, as Sir Robert bids ye," fired out old Cruttenden; "I'll warrant there's a plenty in the larder, and to spare, without interferin' with Mrs. Cook's perkizits—eh, Sir Bobby?"

"Place refreshments in the dining-room, Lawson," said Frederica, quietly; though she frowned involuntarily with chagrin.

"Certainly, Miss Shirley," blandly replied Mr. Lawson, with such a bow as that with which Pope's celebrated *élégant*, 'Lord Fanny,' might have bent before fair 'Molly Lepel.' "Beauty can do what it likes with me," said this Adonis of butlers to himself, as he made his way to the pantry, "for the sake of Miss Freddie's bright eyes I can positively stoop to wait upon that poor, benighted, old cit—'pon my life!"

During the foregoing luncheon-parley, Priscilla Cruttenden and Lieutenant Nelson Strong had been entirely "wrapped up in each other," while Frederica had stood at a table holding in one hand the crumpled letter, and with the other twirling, mechanically, a spray of jasmine which Lord Elverland had presented to her.

Ere long, Lawson re-appeared to announce that luncheon No. II was prepared, and that her ladyship was extremely unwell, and de-

sired Miss Shirley's immediate presence in her dressing-room.

Sir Robert trembled visibly.

Well he might !

That man was to be pitied.

CHAPTER XXI.

Duri lamenti, ed alti gusi.

DANTE.

Her vengeful pride a kind of madness grown.

SIR E. BULWER LYTTON.

"I'm better now, Simpson," were the words that fell on Frederica's ear, as she opened the door of her mother's dressing-room, which apartment was oppressively redolent of *æther*, *sal-volatile*, and *Eau-de-Cologne*.

"What is the matter, mama?" asked

Frederica, in some little astonishment, as she beheld the red and swollen eyelids of Lady Shirley, who was leaning back on a *fauteuil*, while her maid held a bottle of smelling-salts to her nose.

"Matter, child !" repeated the distressed fair one, with a tigress-like moan, "how can you ask ?"

"It's them vulgar personages from the City, Miss, as has disagreed with my lady's nerves, Miss," explained Mrs. Simpson.

"You may leave me now, Simpson. Miss Shirley will attend to me if I want anything more."

And Mrs. Simpson left the dressing-room.

"Well, Frederica Shirley," exclaimed My Lady, with desperate calmness, as she drew herself bolt upright in her seat, "what shall I offer you *now* for your chance of being Countess of Elverland ?"

"What you please, mama," replied Frederica, whose untowardness of spirit returned directly she found herself alone with her worldly, coarse-minded mother.

"Don't drive me mad with your cool impertinence, girl !" cried her ladyship, stamping her foot, "haven't I already been almost sent into convulsions by the arrival of those horrid, low, vulgar wretches down stairs—and now—my own child would add to my trials, would she ? Oh, what we fond mothers *do* have to suffer for our offspring ! To think that those *ojus* abominations should have picked out *this*, of all days in the year, to come and show their disgusting faces ! What *will* Lady Claudia say ? What *will* she think ? What *will* she do ? Cut us, of course ! And Lord Elverland too—he'll put us in the 'Satirist,' and all his Countesses and Duchesses of sisters, and aunts, and cousins will be told—"

"The 'Satirist,' indeed !" repeated Frede-

rica, contemptuously, "surely your ladyship forgets that Lord Elverland is not only a nobleman, but a gentleman?"

"I don't care about that," repeated Lady Shirley, rising, and rushing about the room, like a caged Zoological specimen at feeding-time, "I tell you, you stupid thing, we shall be caricatured, quizzed, cut, pointed at, laughed at! Oh, how my blood boils! I should like to smash, squeeze, crush, strangle, pound them into a powder, till there wasn't such a thing as a *Cruttenden* left in the whole world!"

"My dear mother—" began Frederica, disgusted with Lady Shirley's passionate violence, and yet, in spite of her annoyance, scarcely able to refrain from laughing.

"Hold your tongue, Miss, I tell you; or join me in abusing those diabolical Cruttendens."

"Really, mama—"

"Oh, what will become of me? Just as I

thought we were stepping into the 'peerage'—that I should become the mother of an *Earl*—”

At this grand climax, the excited Thomasina clasped her hands, and banged herself into a chair.

She was about to give way to another wild cataract of tears, when the crumpled letter, which Nelson Strong had given to Frederica, fell upon the carpet, and turned the current of her despairing thoughts.

“Hah !” she exclaimed, starting up, and seizing the letter; before her daughter had time to recover it, “what’s this? Where did this come from? Why, it has n’t been opened—the seal even is n’t broke. My sweetest Freddie, this *must* be a proposal from his lordship ?”

“It is a proposal, I believe, mama.”

“My dear, dear, darling love.”

“But not from Lord Elverland, mama.”

“*Not* from the *Earl*, child ?”

"No."

"Not from that young Vernon, I hope?"

Frederica blushed scarlet from mingled emotions. Her mother, however, took no notice, but, breaking the seal, she quickly skimmed over the contents of the letter, and then, tearing it in halves, she threw it on the floor, and stamped upon it with the vehemence of a maniac, or of an Ashantee-Chief in a War-dance.

"Fool—ass—mechanic—coxcomb—brute," cried my lady, with a laugh worth of Döering's '*Zamiel*,' as she emphasized each euphonious epithet with a fresh stamp on the unfortunate *billet*, "from John Cruttenden, as I am a living woman. Ha! ha! ha! ha! A proposal to the heiress of Oakstone Park, from *Mister John Cruttenden, soap-boiler, Thames Street*. The monkey; the jackanapes; the clown; ha! ha! ha! ha!"

Then, Thomasina Shirley became frightfully

hysterical, and Frederica, really shocked, laid her hand entreatingly on her mother's arm.

"For Heaven's sake, mama, do try to moderate your feelings. Remember, the servants may hear you."

Nor was Miss Shirley's supposition very far wrong.

At the door (*entre-nous*, dear friends), were Mrs. Simpson and Mrs. Lewis, "airing their ears," as Dickens has it, at the key-hole.

"I don't care who hears," vociferated the lady, "but tell, me, child, where are those fiends of darkness—those vile Cruttendens, now?"

"At luncheon, in the dining-room."

"Eating in *my* house—*to-day*?"

"I believe so."

"And that old fool, your father?"

"Papa is with them, I should suppose."

"Then, hear me declare, Frederica Shirley, on this spot, that those detestable Cruttendens

never enter *this* house again as long as *I* live; and that they shall know, too, before I'm five minutes older."

"Mother—mother," cried Frederica, beseechingly, "pray, control yourself. Sit down—try to be calm—I entreat you to sit down—mama—dear mama."

But Lady Shirley, snatching up the torn letter, pushed her daughter from her, and rushed out of the room (fortunately for them, Mesdames Simpson and Lewis had just slipped into an adjoining chamber,) and plunged down the stairs.

Frederica, overcome with shame and mortification, flew to her own apartment, and locking the door, threw herself upon the bed, and burst into tears.

CHAPTER XXII.

Clifford—Nay, trust not half my Lady Bridget says.

COURTLIER'S DAUGHTERS.

It is now high time that we should look after our dear friend, Mrs. Dionysius Wiley, who, in consequence of her Major having a bad head-ache, after the excitement and indifferent port of the Agricultural dinner, has the sole command of the 'carriage,' and Mr. Scoonesbury for the day.

In the first place, Mrs. Wiley drives to Oakstone Park, where she is not admitted, as Sir Robert and my lady are engaged at luncheon with Colonel and Lady Claudia Vandeleur, and Lord Elverland, so polite Mr. Lawson bows her off.

Then, she proceeds to Calverley Rectory, where she is more fortunate, and finds Mrs.

Graham, and her two daughters, seated in their pretty, cheerful drawing-room.

“ Ah, my dear Mrs. Graham, I am delighted to meet with you at home. Miss Lena—Miss Lucy—I will not ask how *you* are—both fresh and blooming as ever. What a lovely purse you are making, Lena—intended for a present, I make no doubt. Come, don’t blush so becomingly, my dear—I wont ask the gentleman’s name. Well, Mrs. Graham, how nicely the dinner at Limehurst went off.”

“ My husband says nothing could have been more successful or agreeable,” returned the Rector’s wife.

“ And did not the Major manage delightfully about Mr. Graham’s going in the carriage with him and Sir Ranulph ? The Major’s knowing enough when he pleases.”

“ Sir Ranulph is always kindness itself,” rejoined Mrs. Graham, quietly.

“ And so are his sisters—at least, to me ; but I flatter myself I am a bit of a favorite at

Rokeby Place. Miss Sacharissa, certainly, is—but, I have no doubt she has an excellent heart—and then—she is so remarkably sensible and well-informed.”

Lucy stole a side-glance at Lena.

“Miss Sacharissa is very original,” observed Mrs. Graham.

“Very ; and so amusing—but what do think, my dear ma’am ? I have just been to Oakstone Park.—”

Our Sophy made a dead halt.

“Lady and Miss Shirley are well, I hope,” said Mrs. Graham.

“I should imagine so, for Lawson told me that they were entertaining friends at luncheon. And who do you suppose the friends were ?”

Mrs. Dionysius drew herself up abruptly, and looked from one to the other of the ladies in turn, with an expression which was evidently intended to prepare them for a surprise.

“Who do you suppose they were ? You’d never guess, I’m sure.

Mrs. Graham and her daughters smilingly shook their heads, being well-accustomed to their visitor's important nothings.

"You give it up, then?" said Mrs. Wiley, looking as if she had just propounded a difficult riddle, "very well—what do you say to the Vandeleurs and Lord Elverland? Only to think of Lady Claudia visiting at Oakstone. I declare to you, when Lawson told me who the friends were, you might have knocked me down with a feather. I could n't believe my ears, ma'am, I was so perfectly amazed."

The Grahams, too, were rather amazed, and the sudden way in which the trio raised their eyes from their respective occupations, and fixed them on Mrs. Wiley, not a little gratified that amiable lady.

She had aroused Mrs. Graham and the girls, for once in a way, from their usual apathetic receiving of her "shreds and patches" of local gossip, and felt rewarded.

"You may well stare my dears," continued

Sophia of the Rose-Bower," to think of those, proud, airified, stuck-up Vale Courtiers (as I call them, ha ! ha !) to think, I say, of their condescending to visit that Lady Shirley—"

"I always thought Lady Shirley was a particular friend of your's, Mrs. Wiley," interrupted Lucy Graham.

"Oh—ah—yes, my dear, her ladyship and I are excellent neighbours, but—really—knowing, as *I* do, *what* she was, and *who* she was, I cannot help being amused at her denying herself to *me*, because she is honored by a call from this extremely fine lady from Vale Court. Ha ! ha ! ha ! it is *too* absurd, upon my word."

"And how long may the Shirleys have been acquainted with Lady Claudia ?" asked Mrs. Graham.

"Only within the last few days, my dear ma'am. It was but a week yesterday, that Lady Shirley was abusing Lady Claudia, to me, up hill and down dale, because, she said,

she kept herself so aloof from all the neighbourhood, except the Stalsfields, Rokebys, Glenmores, and Beauchamps. *How* the Shirleys' have played their cards passes my comprehension !”

“And this Lord *Some-one*,” said Lucy, who was sometimes rather wickedly fond of ‘trotting out our Sophy, “who is he, Mrs. Wiley ?”

“Lord Elverland, my dear—Lady Claudia’s cousin—a good-looking, dashing young man enough, but—”

The Major’s lady again pulled up suddenly, compressed her thin lips tightly together, shook her head, frowned significantly, and coughed.

“Lord Elverland !” exclaimed Lena Graham, “was not that the name of Lord Leybourne’s friend, Lucy ? And was it not Lord Elverland who paid Lady Anne Glenmore so much attention when she first came out ?”

“No doubt it was,” returned Mrs. Wiley,

severely, "and Lady Anne Glenmore isn't the only one to whom the Earl has been pointed in his attentions, I am sorry to say, my dear."

"Do you know, Lord Elverland, then, Mrs. Wiley?" asked Lucy, with her usual quiet archness.

"Not I, Miss Lucy," replied the virtuous Sophia, with a violent repetition of the head-shaking, and another frown of fierce chastity, "very, *very* sorry should I be to number the Earl of Elverland amongst *my* acquaintances, I can assure you."

"Ditto repeated, would be his lordship's sentiments, I should opine," whispered Lucy to Lena, as she leaned over their little work-table to reach her scissars.

"Were Colonel Vandeleur and the Earl at the Agricultural dinner, Mrs. Wiley?" asked Mrs. Graham, hoping to turn the tide of Sophia's conversation, which was, she feared, beginning to wax uncharitable.

"No, indeed, my dear ma'am. The Colonel is too fine, and my Lord Elverland too wild and dissipated to care for the agricultural interests of their country."

"Wild and dissipated!" repeated Lena, "oh, Mrs. Wiley! I never heard Lord Elverland thus spoken of until now. A little inclined to flirt, perhaps—"

"As Lady Anne Glenmore too well knows," added Sophla.

"Very probably," continued Lena, "but as for wild, or dissipated—I cannot believe that he is either."

"Why, Miss Graham?" asked Mrs. Wiley, sharply.

"Because," returned Lena, warmly, "the Earl was Lord Leybourne's bosom-friend at Cambridge; and Lord Leybourne has always been a sort of 'Thaddeus of Warsaw,' *sans peur et sans reproche*. I am certain, had the Earl been what you describe him, Mrs.

Wiley, Lord Leybourne and he could not have been so intimate."

"All very fine, my dear," said the charitable Sophia, "but you are speaking of some three or four years ago. Young men soon change when once they get out into the world, and see life, as they call it. This has been the case with Lady Claudia Vandeleur's cousin I doubt not. As for your, 'Thaddeus of Warsaw,' Miss Lena, we all know that he has been travelling abroad for some time past, and I dare say has become quite a match for his friend, the Earl, in all manner of vice and wickedness. Young men are all alike, depend upon it, Miss Lena—especially your young nobility."

"I hope not, and I think not," returned Lena.

"Lord Leybourne is, at all events, an exception," added her mother.

"That he is, mama !" cried Lucy, with an

excitement in her manner, which attracted the notice both of Mrs. Graham and Mrs. Wiley.

Lucy's soft cheek instantly became suffused.

"And what makes you such a champion of the Viscount's, my dear?" asked Sophy, with a short laugh, and a cunning leer at Lucy.

"Lord Leybourne and his brother, Mr. Hugh Fitz-Walter," said Mrs. Graham, with some annoyance, "were formerly pupils of my husband's, and consequently the girls saw a great deal of them."

"Quite enough," added Lena, "to make us feel certain that Walter—I should say Lord Leybourne—must ever be an ornament to his name and station. Mr. Hugh Fitz-Walter and he were like brothers to Lucy and me. True, we have not seen Lord Leybourn since first he went to the University, six years ago; but I am quite assured that he must ever be a swan among crows', go where he may."

"Upon my word, Miss Lena," exclaimed Mrs. Dixons wagging her head facetiously "it's well that the future owner of that pretty purse you are netting is not here, to hear your defence of the young Viscount! I declare you have been even more energetic in his behalf than Miss Lucy was just now."

The sisters were both silent.

Mrs. Graham now began to wish most heartily that the gentle Sophia would withdraw the light of her countenance from the Rectory.

But Sophia had no idea of quitting the field just yet. Not she.

"Well, my dear friends," she began again, "granted that Lord Leybourne, is, as you said, Miss Lena, a pearl amongst swine—still, I maintain my opinion that the Earl of Elverland is both wild and dissipated. That he has enormous gambling and horse-racing debts, I know from the best authority—in fact, his lordship is terribly out-at-elbows, or he

wouldn't be so anxious to get up a match with Freddie Shirley.

"A match with Miss Shirley!" exclaimed Mrs. Graham and her daughters, with one voice.

"There isn't the shadow of a doubt of it, ladies, you may depend upon it," rejoined Mrs. Wiley, oracularly, "that spendthrift Earl will pay his abominable debts with Freddie Shirley's fortune, or I'm not Sophia Wiley!"

"But I thought that Mr. —," began Lena, but a look from her mother warned her to say no more.

"Well, my dear—you thought—what did you think?"

"Oh, nothing—only—"

"I know what you were going to say, and I'll say it for you. You thought that Mr. Noel Vernon was to be the happy man."

Lena did not reply.

"You needn't speak, my dear young lady," pursued the sage Sophia, "I know what you

mean: but, mine my word for it, my Lady Shirley won't even let Miss Freddie so much as look at Mr. Vernon, now that there's a contract at her disposal. It's a match, I'll stake my word: Fredericka Shirley will be Countess of Elverham, and a miserable woman into the bargain."

"Lena dear," said Mrs. Graham, finding that her gossiping visitor did not seem inclined to move. "I think Lucy and you had better ask Mrs. Wiley to excuse your running away, as it is time you set out for the Warren. Clara begged that you would go very early."

"Pray don't let me detain you, my dears," said Mrs. Dionysius, "do you accompany the young ladies, ma'am?"

Mrs. Graham replied in the negative, and then had the satisfaction of learning that the agreeable Sophy purposed passing another quiet half-hour with her, as she had several little matters to talk about.

Lucy and Lena gladly made their escape,

casting a sly glance of commiseration at their mother, who resumed her work with the hopeless resignation of a martyr, whilst Mistress Wiley immediately began to deliver herself of her "several little things."

Miss Sacharissa Rokeby's ride with Sir Samuel Culpepper—the shameful ingratitude of the Rose-Bower cook—Lord Stalsfield's Ball—the future despair of Noel Vernon, when he should discover that he no longer had a chance of Frederica Shirley—the Major's disordered liver—and the *only* way of making a curry worth eating—formed the most striking items amongst Mrs. Wiley's "several little things."

At last, the entrance of Mr. Graham and his pupil, Algernon De Lacey, released the fatigued listener from "durance vile."

Mrs. Dionysius Wiley was somewhat afraid of her Rector, so, as soon as she had shaken hands with him, she expressed a fear that her "poor Major" would be growing tired of his invalid-solitude.

If Mrs. D. W. had ~~known~~ ^{known} this, she was never more mistaken in her title;—but she didn't.

We may as well have ~~any~~ ^{seen} something of Algernon De Lacey, as we shall see and hear more of him ere long.

In the first place, he was what may be termed a "Beauty-Man."

He was elegant in appearance and manner; not particularly deep in intellect, but, nevertheless, brilliant and somewhat accomplished; spoke a little German, a little French, a little Italian, and even a *smidgeon* of Spanish; in all of which languages he could sing, to his own accompaniment on the piano or guitar, in a rich, musical *baritone*, songs both mournful and mirthful—

"Which so tickled the ears of the ladies,
That to hear him, they came from afar.

Well-born and well-bred, but poor, Algernon

De Lacey was glad enough to become Mr. Graham's pupil ; for the neighbourhood of Calverley was excellent, and the seat of his father's old friend and distant relation, Lord Stalsfield, was so conveniently at hand.

At Calverley Castle, Algernon was always a welcome guest.

At an early age he had been left an orphan, under the guardianship of an eccentric old-bachelor uncle, who sent him to Harrow, where he was so idle, that General De Lacey would not hear of his going to either University. So, from seventeen to eighteen, Algernon was suffered to loiter his time away, according to his own devisings, when his uncle got him appointed *Attachè* to a foreign embassy. A year and a half sickened him of this sort of life, and he once more returned to the General's. The old gentleman wanted him to go to St. Bees' College, to prepare for holy orders ; but our young *Ex-Attachè* would not hear of such a thing ; the army, he thought,

was more in his line. Upon *that* notion the testy guardian put his decided *veto*.

At last, through Lord Stalsfield, General De Lacey heard that Mr. Graham was looking out for a pupil, and at once determined on sending his nephew to Calverley Rectory for a year or two; meanwhile, "something might turn up." Gladly did Algernon avail himself of this opportunity of escaping from his crabbed old uncle; and so it was, he took up his abode at the *Grahams'*.

The Rector and he pulled amazingly well together.

He was also a favorite with Mrs. Graham and the girls, albeit, the former had told him more than once that she considered him rather too much of the *Adonis* and *troubadour* for a reading man. As for the home-circle at the Castle, nothing could be done in it without Algernon De Lacey.

If Lord Stalsfield were obliged to have a *very* political *clique* at his dinner-table, De Lacey

must come to keep the young Ladies Fitz-Walter from falling asleep during the second course.

If the Countess wanted alterations made in her own pet garden, no one could draw out such elegant designs as Algernon De Lacey. Not a rustic basket could be placed, or a new *parterre* cut, until *he* had been consulted, his taste was so exquisite.

If the Lady Jane Fitz-Walter came to a stand-still concerning the ornamental part of her model school-house, now in process of building, or required a new Gregorian chant for her choristers, the immediate cry was—

“Where is Mr. De Lacey?”

If Lady Idonia wished to arrange a *tableau*, or *vaudeville*, for private representation, that ‘dear Algernon’ must be called in.

If Lady Alicia wanted some new *cavatins* or *romances*, who could make out such a lovely list as that ‘delightful Algernon’?

If Lady Amy—but the Lady Amy was

only just sixteen—she had not been presented—of course, *she* could never want Algernon De Lacey for anything at all !

The Honourable Hugh and Honourable Richard Fitz-Walter declared that De Lacey was a deuced good fellow, and wished that more young fellows were made of the same stuff !

v Lastly, the little Ladies, Mary and Maude, and the little Honourables, William and Reginald, were never in want of a play-fellow when ' Algy ' was at the Castle !

So much for the "Beauty-Man," whom we will now leave with Mr. and Mrs. Graham, and return once more to Oakstone Park.

CHAPTER IV.

What conclave's this, that jovial sits,
Clubbing with noisy glee their various wits.

GEORGE MUNE.

Lord Tinsel.—You're now another man. Your house
is changed—
Your table changed—your retinue—your horse—
Where once you rode a hack, you now back blood;
Befits it then you also change your friends.

THE HUNCHBACK.

POOR Sir Robert sat at the head of the table,
at luncheon, No. 2, and, oh! how small he

appeared, with old Jacob Cruttenden on the one side of him, and Miss Priscilla and her Nelson on the other.

Behind his master's chair stood the elegant Mr. Lawson, looking most ineffable disgust at the *quartette* in general, in which laudable contempt of the City and its denizens, *en masse*, he was joined by the two subordinate *Jeameses* in attendance.

"Capital stuff that?" said the Lieutenant, having tossed off a glass of Burgundy, closing one eye, and smacking his lips with the air of a *connoisseur*; "that's what I call prime!"

"Taint bad," observed Cruttenden, knowingly.

"I believe ye, gov'nor!" resumed Nelson Strong. "Why, you don't touch your glass, Priscy—don't you like it?"

"La! Nelson, I'm sure I do," simpered the young lady; "but you know how seldom I take wine. Wine and malt-liquor are not quite suitable beverages *pour les demoiselles*,

as Miss Crabbett used to tell us at Albemarle House."

(Miss Cruttenden had been *finished* at Albemarle House !)

"What ! did the old tabby recommend gin-sling, and rum toddy, then, Priscy ?"

"How can you, Nel ?"

"Miss Crabbett's a fool, gurl," growled old Crut, with his capacious mouth full of lobster-salad, "stuff a' nonsense !"

"But she said, pa, that when she lived as *gouvernante* to Lady Jebb's daughters, the Misses Jebb never touched a glass of wine from one year's end to another. It isn't considered *the thing*, and, therefore——"

"The thing be hanged !" bawled Jacob ; "gammon !—who care's what's *the thing* ? Don't quarrel with your bread-and-butter, Pris—nor your drink neither. Eat and tipple what's give to ye. This aint stuff to be despised on a hot day, is it, Strong ?"

"I believe ye, guv'nor," replied the son of Neptune, nodding his head waggishly, "here's my love t' ye, Priscy, my lass—Sir Robert, your good health—guv'nor, here's your's."

Sir Robert gave a little twitch of a bow, and just touched his glass with his lips.

How he trembled at the mere mention of health-drinking! If my lady should but pop her head into the room!

Poor Sir Robert!

After a space, when dire havoc had been made with the contents of dishes and decanters by the two male guests, old Crut and his intended son-in-law began to wax jocular, and Miss Priscilla playful.

Insomuch that Mr. Lawson and the brace of gigantic *Jeameses*, with a true sense of the ludicrous, gradually unbent from their aristocratic *hauteur*, and evidently began to enter into the humour of the scene, regarding it as a bit of low comedy, got up for their especial delectation.

"I wish h'our Jack wuz 'ere," cried Mr. Cruttenden, "that I do, with hall my 'art. If he was, I bet Freddie wouldn't be h'out o' the way so long—eh, Strong?"

Nelson winked and jerked his head.

"But where is the young gipsy, Sir Bobby, eh?" continued Jacob, "aint she a-comin' to drink a glass o' wine with her old friend, I wonder?"

"Freddie—ehem!—she is—ehem!" stammered our small Knight.

"Oh! she is, is she?" shouted old Cruttenden, with a roar of laughter, "well, that's 'splanatory, if it aint sat'sfactory, anyhow—eh, Strong?"

"Lady Shirley is ill, you know, pa," suggested Priscilla, who, although not very bright, could not but observe the evident discomfiture of their entertainer, and the scarcely-suppressed laughter of Messrs. Lawson and Co., "and Frederica is with her."

"Yes—yes exactly so," cried Sir Robert, eagerly.

"That's it, is it?" said Jacob, pulling out a huge silver snuff-box, and flourishing his red and yellow silk pocket handkerchief about, "well, I s'pose she and my lady 'll show up by-an'-by—eh, Sir Bobby? I say, who the dooce d'ye think I come across last Toosday in Change Alley? Why, Bill Shillibeer—him as was with Gorbit and Griffin, an' run away to sea! You remember him, I'll be bound, Bob?"

"I—can't say I do," murmured Sir Robert, shuffling, about on his chair, as though he were sitting upon rampant fish-hooks.

"Can't say ye do?" repeated Cruttenden, pouring out another glass of wine, half of which went on to the cloth, "well, your mem'ry *his* a-failin' of ye soon, Bobby! Not rec'lect Bill Shillibeer—him as went with me, and you, and Tony Gibbs, my lady's brother,

to Putney—'afore you took to the spinnin'-Jinnies—when we wuz all a-servin' our time, and we all got so precious drunk? And don't you rec'lect your wantin' to pull——”

A most mysterious sound was here given utterance to by one of the *Jeameses*, which sounded so unmistakeably like a half-choked laugh, that poor, miserable Sir Robert could bear it no longer, and turning suddenly round to Lawson, he said, as composedly as he could—

“You may leave the room, Lawson. Williams—Jenkins—you needn't stay any longer. No—leave the table as it is—I will ring if anything is wanted.”

And so the *Signori* Lawson, Williams, and Jenkins quitted the dining-room.

In a few moments the butler's pantry echoed to such shouts of laughter as butler's pantry has seldom echoed to before or since.

The dismissal of these gentlemen-in-waiting broke off the thread of Jacob's narrative, but

inclining his large head confidentially towards Sir Robert, the exhilarated Boiler of Soap addressed him in what was intended for a *sotto voce*.

"You used to be partial to music, Bob Shirley—d'ye like it now?"

"Oh, certainly—yes—yes—I'm extremely fond of music," replied the Knight, seizing with avidity on any subject likely to draw Mr. Cruttenden's mind away from reminiscences of their *Bill-Shillibeer* days.

"That's right, Sir Bobby," resumed Jacob, "you wuz h'always a supporter o'the fine harts—music in pertikler. Many's the six-pence you an'ne spent over them *consorts* at White Cundit 'Ouse—eh, Bobby?"

"Do you ever attend the Opera, Miss Priscilla?" asked Sir Robert, fearing that old Crut might *hark-back* to his quondam friend, Mr. William Shillibeer.

"Miss Prisciller, be hanged!" exclaimed Jacob, with a sneer, and a bang on the table

with his big fist, "why don't ye call the gurl, Pris, as ye used to do, and had ought to do now? Pris—her name's Pris, or Priscy, Bob Shirley. Don't give us no more o'yer Miss Priscillers, if *you* please!"

"Well then, Pris, or Priscy," resumed Sir Robert, with a nervous, sickly smile, "have you ever been to the Opera, my dear?"

"La! yes, Sir Robert," replied Pris or Priscy, "I've been many a time. Nelson and I are so passionately fond of Italian music. We went twice to the Opera last season. Isn't Mario a beautiful, delicious darling? My bosom-friend, Fanny Hawkins, is over head and ears in love with him, and so is the Duchess of Repton, they say. And Lablache, too—isn't he a dear, funny, old thing?"

"Hoprer be'anged!" bawled her papa, "hall gammon an'gibberish, I say. Come, Strong, my man—if Sir Bobby's as fonda' music as he were, let's have one o'yer own real sen-

sible, *nautial* songs about Brittanyer, an' Harrythoozer, an' the Bay o' Biscay, O ! Them's the right sort, ole boy !"

Saying which, Jacob gave the little Knight such a slap on the shoulder, that he almost knocked him off his chair.

"La ! Pa !" exclaimed Miss Priscilla, perceiving that her parent had imbibed quite a sufficiency of Burgundy, sherry, and port, letting alone pale-ale, "how rude you are !"

"Rude, girl !" vociferated Crut, "go to the—But, come, Mr. Liftenant, let's'ave the 'Bay o'Biscay'—

'H'and as we lay, h'all on a day,
H'in the Bay o' Biscay O !"

Just as the harmonious Soap-boiler had roared forth this distich, excessively out of tune, the dining-room door flew open wide, and Lady Shirley, the torn letter in her hand,

bounced in, the very embodiment of bursting rage and boiling indignation.

Her spacious countenance glared of a deep scarlet, approaching to claret-colour—her dark eyes flashed fire—her bosom heaved tempestuously—and the whole of her substantial frame quivered from head to foot. So might incensed and haughty Juno have looked, on the discovery of one of her good gentleman's little *liaisons* with Mesdames Semele, Leda, Latona &c.

"Hullo, my Lady !" cried Jacob, rising from his chair, and in his present state of exhilaration forgetting what a Tartar he had to deal with, "what's the row ? You look a bit warmish ! Here, give us yer' and !"

Thomasina Shirley said not a syllable, but *did* give Mr. Jacob Cruttenden her hand, nor did Jacob forget the gift in a hurry.

Up went the hand—*out* went the hand—a startling sound—*down* went the hand !

Jacob Cruttenden had received the hardest

box on the ear that ever made water come into a Soap-boiler's eyes, or the noise of rushing waves in his ears !

"The devil !" shouted Crut, in a state of bewilderment, as he hastily pulled three or four chairs between himself and My Lady, "the woman's mad or drunk !"

"Thomasina !" faltered Sir Robert, who literally knew not whether he was on his head or his heels, "*do* you know what you've done ?"

The Lady of Oakstone again raised the fatal hand ; but this time her fiery glance was directed towards her husband.

"Order these people out of the house immediately, sir," she exclaimed, "or I leave it for ever !"

"My dear Thomasina," began the trembling Knight.

"Did you hear what I said, sir ?"

"Lady Shirley—my good—"

"*Did* you hear what I said ?"

“ Y-e-s !”

“ Then, act accordingly. Out with them, sir—out with them, I say—this very instant !”

Then My Lady commenced a step or two of her Ashantee War-Dance

The threatening hand rose higher.

Thomasina Shirley drew nearer to Sir Robert.

It was a moment of thrilling excitement.

By this time, poor Priscy was in floods of tears on the protecting breast of her Nelson, who was himself utterly astonished and thrown on his beam-ends.

Never before had the Lieutenant beheld such a lady as the Lady of Oakstone Park, save the figure-head of H. M. war-ship, Fury.

“ My dear Cruttenden, I believe you had better—” again began little Sir Robert, who could have cried for less than a groat, “ I believe you had better—I—you—”

"Idiot!" almost shrieked the frantic Thomasina, seizing Sir Robert by the shoulder, 'turn them out, I say! Go—go—you abominable interlopers—go—go!"

"I say, Guv'nor," suggested the Lieutenant, who was beginning to feel quite in a *Bob-Acres* plight, "we'd best clear the decks and shear off, whilst we've sea-room."

Sir Robert looked piteously and imploringly, first at Strong, and then at old Cruttenden, as much as to say—"for heaven's sake, go!" while My Lady pointed to the door, still holding the *disjecta membra* of the letter clenched in her savage grasp.

"Well," said Jacob, whose vinose excitement had now quite succumbed to indignation and disgust at the treatment he had met at the hands of Lady Shirley, "the sooner the better, Strong. My Lady—may we never meet no more o'this side o'the Thames—nor t'other neither, for the matter o'that! Good-bye, Bob Shirley—you're a hold fool, but I

don't bear ye no malice. Thank ye for a good feed, and God bless ye! Good-bye, Sir Robert, we shan't see much each o' t'other agen, I dare to say—good-bye, old friend. Come along, Pris—come along, Strong! Here—we'll go out the way as I come, without them grinnin 'flunkey-fellers makin' faces at us."

"Take that with ye, though," cried Lady Shirley, tearing poor Jack Cruttenden's proposal into a hundred pieces, and throwing it after old Jacob, as he, followed by Priscilla and the Lieutenant, vanished through the open window into the garden.

And so ended Jacob Cruttenden's last visit to Oakstone Park.

"Thank goodness the servants have n't seen 'em again!" exclaimed Lady Shirley, as, clasping her hands on her capacious bust, she sank into the embraces of an arm-chair, in a most violent fit of hysterics.

No wonder!—why, the passion she had

been in, would have *killed* the generality of women.

Mr. Lawson, as you may be sure, was not far from the dining-room door, and, consequently, was not long in summoning Mesdames Simpson and Lewis to the assistance of their shrieking lady, who, when the wildered lord of her affections attempted to approach her, kicked at him, first with one foot, then with the other.

"Hah! I knowed 'ow it would be!" moaned Mrs. Simpson, shaking her head dolorously, as she held a salts-bottle to her struggling mistress' nose. "Such persons as them as is jest gone, is enough to disarrange any one's nerves—*exspecially* sich delicate ones as poor, dear My Lady's."

"It's shameful, it is," chimed in Mrs. Lewis, glancing at the small Knight, as though it were all his fault; "sich things 'll be the death of her."

"'Old hup her ladyship's 'ead, Mrs. Lewis,"

quoth Simpson. "Come, come, my lady, take a sup o' *camphyer-juliet* ! There, now, my lady ; yer ladyship's better now—aint ye, my lady ?"

"Better, Simpson !" exclaimed the fair hysterical, "I shall never be better while *that* man stands there, staring at me like a fool."

Mr. Lawson drew himself up, and was about to quit the room.

"No, not you, my good Lawson ; I meant your master," said Lady Shirley, in a whining voice ; "go away, Sir Robert—you irritate me past all endurance—go away, I say !"

And, as her ladyship suddenly started to her feet, her better-half darted out of the room like a shot.

"Now then, Lawson," said the invalid, her voice still maintaining its lachrymose tone, "give me your arm, on one side—Simpson, do you come on the other."

END OF VOL. I.

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